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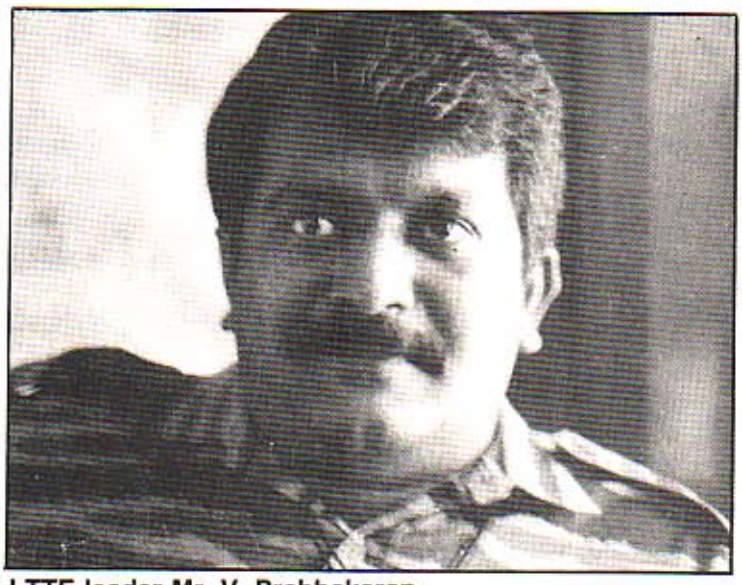
'We want an end to this war'
— LTTE Leader



LTTE leader Mr. V. Prabhakaran

★ **Peace process has started**
— Prime Minister

★ **Prospects for Peace**

★ **Dawn of another era**

★ **The Chandrika Mystique In Jaffna**

★ **Discussion in Dissent**

★ **Presidential Election**
— UNP Defeat Predicted

★ **Election Results**

★ **Indo-Pakistan Relations**

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'LAJJA': Death Reward for Free Expression

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I do not agree with a word of what you say, but I'll defend to the death your right to say it.
– Voltaire.

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Prospects For Peace

The outcome of the recently held elections followed by the assumption to power of the Peoples Alliance with Mrs. Chandrika Kumaratunga as Prime Minister at the helm has qualitatively transformed the political situation in Sri Lanka in many respects, especially producing a conducive climate in which all sections of the people are thinking and talking about the positive prospects of peace in the island after years of conflict.

The government's unilateral measures in taking steps towards the relaxation of the draconian economic embargo which prohibited the transport of a substantial number of consumer items essential to the life of the community in the north of the island, the announcement of the intention to restore electrical power supply which has been disrupted since June 1990, and the avoidance of major offensive operations by the security forces including routine aerial bombardment and shelling from naval gunboats followed by the equally positive reciprocal gesture on the part of the LTTE in releasing ten of the captured policemen from their custody have combined to create for the first time in many years a climate that is conducive for peace in the island.

In fact the expectations of almost all people both within and outside Sri Lanka have risen to a level of anticipation of peace breaking out in the not too distant future. On the basis of reports, this is particularly so in the war torn areas of the northeast. Only a congenital war-monger devoid of any feeling for human suffering will feel surprised at this natural urge and thirst of the people for an opportunity to lead a normal peaceful life after going through the traumatic and tragic experience of years of armed conflict that has had the effect of distorting and destroying the lives of millions of people.

The government and the LTTE ought to be congratulated for the initial steps that they have taken to create this changed atmosphere. The Prime Minister campaigned at the recent elections on a platform promising to bring an end to the war and seek a political solution through negotiations. She got the mandate to do so primarily from the Sinhala people. The pronouncements she has made and the steps she has taken since her election have been in keeping with her promise. On the other hand, the LTTE leader in his recent interview has categorically declared that for their part they also want an end to the conflict and seek a solution through negotiations. Both parties have appointed emissaries to engage in preliminary negotiations which we hope will lead to more detailed and meaningful discussions at higher levels.

What one should not forget is that we have been here before. The Indo-Sri Lanka Agreement of July 1987 and arrival of the Indian Peace Keeping Force, and the commencement of negotiations between the then Premadasa government and the LTTE in early 1989 gave rise to great expectations that the conflict was to end and peace and normalcy would return. But what followed were some of the worst and fiercest military encounters in which millions of people suffered and tens of thousands died.

The tragic experience of recent years has demonstrated beyond doubt that the ethnic conflict cannot be resolved by military means. Hence what is required of the present leaders on both sides is to commit themselves genuinely and absolutely to a peace process. Negotiations may take a long time. There may be difficulties in reaching a settlement because of the respective positions to which the parties are already committed. Ultimately everything depends on the readiness of the parties to give and take and to compromise without sticking stubbornly to preconceived entrenched positions.

War results in death and destruction. Making peace is a noble course. The people want an end to their suffering. They yearn for peace. They expect the leaders to deliver it.

'We Want an End To This War'

– LTTE Leader V. Prabhakaran

'The ordinary Sinhala people don't want the war to continue. We know very well that they want only peace. The results of the recent elections also show this. We also want peace. We want a permanent settlement, and for everyone to live in harmony', the leader of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) said in an exclusive interview with Ms. Ananthi Sooriyapragasam, a B.B.C. Tamil Service presenter, who recently undertook the hazardous journey to the war-torn Jaffna in northern Sri Lanka.

Stating that they were prepared to begin negotiations without preconditions, the Tiger leader urged the government to agree on a ceasefire which he said would create a conducive climate for peace talks. Expressing regret for the 'unfortunate circumstances' in which the Muslims of Jaffna were expelled, Mr. Prabhakaran said they could return to their homes in Jaffna when normalcy is restored:

Q: Chandrika has said her priority is to find a solution to the ethnic conflict. Is there a suitable environment for negotiations?

A: We are prepared to have unconditional talks. We would like to hold these talks in a peaceful climate. The new government has relaxed the embargo. That is a very positive goodwill gesture, and we welcome it. But the embargo has not been completely lifted. There is still an embargo on some essential goods. Besides this, the government is still keeping the route for travel [between Jaffna and the south] closed. Due to this, economic conditions are not going to improve, and the suffering of the people is not going to decrease. It is very important that peaceful conditions should be created. We have informed [the government] that we are prepared for a ceasefire. But it appears that the government is rather reluctant for a ceasefire. The activities of the armed forces are continuing, especially attacks by the navy. This is a hindrance to a peaceful climate. In short, if you look at it, normality has not come to the Tamil areas. There is an atmosphere of goodwill, but normality has not returned. Therefore the government should take positive action to bring normality.

Q: You have been saying you're prepared for unconditional talks. But now you're imposing conditions – for example, that the embargo should be lifted, or that a ceasefire should be declared. Why?

A: We have not imposed any conditions for negotiations. We are only pointing out that a peaceful atmosphere is necessary for peace talks. If a ceasefire is not announced, isn't there a possibility of fighting breaking out? What's the meaning of waging war on the one hand, while talking about peace on the other? Therefore we say that a ceasefire is important for negotiations. Because as long as economic pressure and war continues, you cannot hold negotiations in good faith. The new government should keep this in mind. If the government agrees to a ceasefire, we would take that as a goodwill gesture, a gesture of peace.

Q: You say a ceasefire should be announced. But there's a feeling in Sri Lankan military circles that if there's a ceasefire, the Tigers would use it to regroup and strengthen themselves.

A: This opinion among military circles is totally wrong. In a military sense, a ceasefire is not beneficial to us. Our strength and growth depends on our capturing weapons from the enemy. It's through war activities that this is possible. Therefore it is wrong to think that a ceasefire would strengthen us. Even so, we are in favour of a ceasefire in order to create the real atmosphere for peace, not for anything else. The other thing is, in an atmosphere where there is no ceasefire, there can be unexpected clashes. Lives may be lost. Such incidents can affect the talks and the atmosphere for peace.

Q: You've been insisting that the Tamils should have a homeland. But Chandrika has said she won't accept the concept of a homeland for the Tamils and that she won't accept a merged north-east. But she is prepared to re-demarcate the island's administrative units to try to solve the problem. What's your stand on this?

A: The entire Tamil nation has always insisted that Tamils should have a homeland. This is a historical fact. The north-east is the homeland of the Tamil-speaking people – that is Tamil and Muslims. This is our stand. We do not know the stand taken by Prime Minister Chandrika Kumaratunga on this. We don't know her new plans. Therefore it is not wise to express an opinion before we have studied her plan. During the talks we will find out what the government's stand is on this, and then we'll say what we think about it.

Q: In the event of negotiations taking place, will you agree to the other Tamil groups taking part in these negotiations?

A: These Tamil groups have been talking to the government individually and collectively. We have no objection to that but we believe that this government has realised who the real representatives of the Tamil people are, and who has been struggling for them. So we would like the government to talk to the true representatives of the Tamil people. It is such talks which would be useful and meaningful.

Q: You broke off talks with the Premadasa government in June 1990. Why should the government trust you and talk to you?

A: It's wrong to say that we broke off talks with the Premadasa government. For nearly two years, the talks were going on. But during this period, none of the basic problems of the Tamils were discussed. The Premadasa government did not put forward any solution regarding the Tamils' national problem. Because of this, the talks dragged on and in the end reached a standstill. This is what really happened. It is wrong to say that we betrayed their trust. This is all malicious propaganda. In all the talks, we have given priority to the welfare of our people. We've always insisted that our people should be allowed to live in peace, with respect, and with all their rights. The talks broke down because Sinhala governments refused to grant our people their basic rights. It is the Tamils who from time immemorial have been cheated by the governments. It is the Sinha-

la governments that broke agreements. It is they who have betrayed the Tamils. If the new government is determined to accept the reasonable demands of the Tamils and give them justice, the government need not have any fear that the Tigers would let them down.

Q: It is said that it is the Tamils who are blocking attempts to open the routes between Jaffna and the mainland.

A: There is no truth in these allegations. There are two routes between Jaffna and the mainland. One is through Pooneryn, the other through Elephant Pass. The government has closed both of these. The military stopped the flow of people with the intention of laying siege to Jaffna. Therefore people have to travel through Kilali Lagoon. To stop even this, government forces have launched many attacks. To enable the people to travel through Kilaly, the Sea Tigers have made many sacrifices. Today Kilaly is under our control. People are able to travel without any fear with protection from the Sea Tigers. But if the government can open a land route to enable people and vehicles to pass, we will welcome that. People should be able to move freely without any army checkpoints. The government should withdraw the army from Pooneryn. And if the Sangupiddy route is opened, I'm sure our people will welcome that.

Q: Why didn't you take part in last month's parliamentary elections?

A: We have to find a permanent solution to the Tamil problem. It's only after that we can consider taking part in the elections. Tamils have taken part in parliamentary politics for a long time, but parliamentary politics have failed to find a solution to the Tamil problem. Not only that, it is through Parliament that a lot of repressive measures were introduced against the Tamils. From time immemorial the Sri Lanka Parliament has fulfilled the aspirations of the majority Sinhala people. They have suppressed the interests of the Tamils. In this atmosphere, we didn't consider we'd achieve anything by going to Parliament. We didn't want to take part in elections that were held in an illegal manner in the north and east.

Q: I went to Puttalam recently and met Muslim refugees there who were expelled from Jaffna by you. All those I spoke to said they lived peacefully and happily with the Tamils, and were very sad they'd been expelled. If their safety can be guaranteed, they said they were prepared to go back to Jaffna. If normalcy returns to Jaffna, will you allow these people to return to their own homes?

A: Jaffna is their own land. Unfortunately, due to circumstances, they had to become refugees. We are sorry about it. If normalcy returns, we'll allow them to come back to Jaffna. Due to the war situation in the Jaffna peninsula alone there are 300,000 Tamil refugees. Some of these are now settled in places where Muslims used to live. If the military leaves the places they have occupied, these refugees will be able to go back to their own homes. If that situation occurs, we'll allow the Muslims to come back to Jaffna.

Q: There's a mood for peace all over the island. In the north and east as well as in the south, people want a solution. Under these circumstances, leaving aside the politicians, what's your message to the ordinary Sinhala people?

A: The ordinary Sinhala people don't want the war. We know very well that they want only peace. The results of these elections also show this. We also want peace. We want a permanent settlement, and for everyone to live in harmony. Today the big obstacle to peace is war. There should be an end to war. Those who waged war against the Tamils should also come forward to end this war. The Sinhala people should realise that a solution can't be found to the Tamil problem through war. It's only through granting the reasonable demands and political aspirations of the Tamils that there can be a solution. The Sinhala people should make the militarist and the Sinhala racist elements realise this. We love the Sinhala people. We are not against them. It is the racists who are responsible for the hostility and the differences between the Sinhalese and the Tamils. The Sinhala people should identify these communal elements, and should reject them. It's only then that there will be permanent peace in this island.

'The Chandrika Mystique' in Jaffna

– by Rita Sebastian –

JAFFNA – 'It is the Chandrika season' said my friend Yogan as we pushed our way through the crowded streets outside the famed Nallur Kandasamy kovil, where the temple festival was nearing its end.

The Chandrika mystique seemed to have caught the popular imagination, her name floating in the evening air as stall holders offered anything from 'Chandrika bangles to Chandrika pans'. And not to be outdone, a little boy selling plastic helicopters showed a captive audience how Chandrika would fly into this northern city for peace talks.

Seeing the women in their gold and their silks at the temple festivities, or two days later, the congregation at the celebrations at the Lady of Refuge church, you would hardly believe this is a war-torn land.

But behind those smiling faces is hidden the trauma and hardship of a decade old war in which thousands have been killed and thousands more injured. In 1993 alone, according to a doctor at the Jaffna hospital, 1,111 war victims, both civilians and LTTE fighters, died in the hospital.

The embargo on certain drugs, the lack of transport leading to non-functional anti-natal clinics, and the high price of basic foods has also impinged severely on the people registering a rise in maternal and infant mortality rates in the peninsula.

And the fear and the trauma still continue as was demonstrated one morning last week when the drone of an aircraft made some women go flat on their faces. To them it was the fear of another bombing raid.

But teenager Ram continued sitting where we did, on the verandah of a friend's home. That's a 'Pukara' he said identifying the

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aircraft for me. Displaced from his home in a village close to the northern Pallay airbase, Ram has moved in with relations. For him it has meant a new home, a new school and new friends. There are many like Ram who have learnt to adapt to every changing situation.

For almost 4 years the people of the peninsula have done without electricity. Students study by lamplight and the streets are unlit, except for an occasional kerosene lamp.

The fuel embargo which has virtually crippled the transport services has spawned a new bicycle culture in the peninsula. And for both the young, and the not young, it has become the only mode of transport.

A friend, the mother of three adult children, who never dreamed she would ever ride a bicycle, today does all her travelling on it. Whether it is cycling 4 miles to the market daily, to church, or visiting a friend in another village, the bicycle has become her most faithful companion.

The deprivations have been many, specially in the last four years of the economic embargo. And now suddenly the very arrival of chocolates into the peninsula, one of the embargoed items, makes news. The price of bread has dropped so also the price of kerosene.

But what becomes strikingly apparent in Jaffna are the administrative structures that have been set in place by the LTTE leadership. Thamil Eelam is very much the essence of life in the peninsula. And it is the LTTE leadership that takes the decisions, like it did early this week when it banned Indian films.

The reason behind the banning is 'the vulgarity and the violence that have become commonplace in Indian cinema' said an LTTE cadre in explanation. Replacing the Indian films will be films produced in Jaffna. The LTTE's cinema unit has already produced two films, both on the Liberation struggle. The target is two films in the pipeline every month.

Indian music, described as going against traditional Tamil cultural norms has also been banned. What you hear in the peninsula are mostly freedom songs of battles won, and the hundreds of young men and women who have sacrificed their lives for an ideal.

And nobody in the peninsula can ever forget the 'freedom struggle'. You see its physical presence everywhere. Not only in the stone and the rubble of destroyed buildings, but in the lifesize cutouts, framed photographs, and painted pictures of 'martyred Tigers', which has turned the peninsula into a living memorial for those killed. Dominating it all is 'Colonel Kittu', alias Sathasivam Krishnakumar who blew up the ship he was travelling in, in January 1993, when the Indian Navy tried to apprehend him.

Yet inspite of all this there is a fervent hope for peace. An almost tangible excitement in the air. But both sides are well aware that it is a long hard road, but as long as there is willingness on both sides, peace no longer appears the illusive dream.

Crossing the Lagoon

by Rita Sebastian

Armed with Defence Ministry clearance for Kilinochchi we began the long, hazardous journey north. Vavuniya was the first hurdle. The military police check our bags and our vehicle and we head a 25-lorry convoy carrying flour to Kilinochchi.

Flagged through the Thandikulam checkpoint we drive to Nocchimodai 3 kilometres away. 'You go beyond this at your own risk' read a warning. We brave that warning and drive on through the last forward defence lines of the military, and into the 4-kilometre stretch of 'no man's land'.

On the way we pass hundreds of men, women and children, their luggage on their heads and in their hands, struggling along in the hot noon day sun.

The next barrier takes us into Tiger territory. We go through the same routine as on the other side as our bags and our bonafides are checked. And in a cadjan fenced enclosure under the trees where dozens of Tiger cadres, both men and women sit at long tables we are issued entry passes into the peninsula. A good two hours later on a rutty pot-holed road we reach Kilinochchi. It is Sunday and not a regular boat day. So we make other arrangements and in the early evening we drive to Nallur Point, and across the sandy beach, where makeshift roads have evolved out of constant use.

The sun is just setting as we make it to the Tiger harbour, one of the many that dot the coastline, most of them for cargo that passes back and forth from the peninsula.

Darkness soon overtakes us and we board the boat that is to take us across the lagoon. Eight of us begin what to me was an uncertain journey, the destination a fact only after being reached. The boat is physically pushed into the water for about 500 metres before the engines, (there were 2) kerosene powered came to life.

We are now into the army's 'no-go zone'. In peace time it would have been idyllic, sailing across the lagoon under a million stars. This was war-time and frightening, because we were in the line of fire.

We had no sea Tiger escorts, who on boat days clear a safe corridor for the passengers between Nallur Point and Killali on the northern side. We were a single boat and to say I was afraid would be an understatement.

The boat did not sail directly across the lagoon. It detoured to avoid Pooneryn on the left, and Elephant Pass on the right as the searchlights from the two army camps flashed across the waters.

And I kept looking all around me all the time and then suddenly there was a light brighter than starlight in the sky over Pooneryn. For one terrible moment I thought it was a helicopter. No said a fellow passenger. That's a 'para light'. The light stayed stationary for a few minutes before disintegrating.

Across the water the light, which serves as a lighthouse for the boats seemed almost within touching distance, and the shore seemed close and my spirits brightened. But it

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NEWS IN BRIEF

★ **EMBARGO RELAXED:** As a first step in keeping its election pledge to bring about a political solution to the ethnic conflict, the Peoples Alliance government made its first unilateral move on 31 August by announcing a substantial relaxation of the ban on the transport of essential items to the war-torn northern Jaffna peninsula. The government's action permitted the free flow of 28 of nearly 48 items banned from being transported to Jaffna since June 1990. The 28 items include medicines, soap, biscuits, kerosene, radios, coconut oil, chocolate, generators and bicycles.

In announcing the relaxation of the ban, Prime Minister Mrs. Chandrika Kumaratunga said: 'We decided to lift the ban on these items to relieve the burden and suffering of the people. This step is the first in a series of steps that we will take to solve the ethnic problem'.

★ **TIGERS RELEASE POLICEMEN:** In what is described as a positive response to the government's relaxation of the ban on the transport of essential items to northern Jaffna, on 3 September the LTTE released ten out of nearly 39 policemen in their custody since June 1990. Following a medical check-up, the freed policemen were reunited with their relatives on 5 September at the Ratmalana Airport.

In releasing the policemen, the LTTE leader Mr. V. Prabhakaran, in a statement read out in their stronghold Jaffna, said: 'We earnestly believe that our decision to release a group of detainees will be viewed as a reciprocal gesture of goodwill and understanding. We are willing to cooperate with the new government in all its efforts to create congenial conditions of peace and normalcy which are conducive for the conduct of peace negotiations'.

In another twist, PC Linton Dharmapala began a hunger strike at the police hospital as he demanded an inquiry into the circumstances in which senior officials ordered hundreds of police officers to surrender with their weapons to the LTTE in eastern Sri Lanka at the direction of the then President Premadasa. Mr. Dharmapala said: 'We suffered for the first seven months after we were captured; but after the Red Cross officials visited us we were treated well'.

★ **EXCHANGING NOTES:** LTTE leader Mr. V. Prabhakaran sent a fax message through the ICRC to Prime Minister Mrs. Kumaratunga following the relaxation by the government of the economic embargo and the reciprocal release of ten policemen by the Tigers. In return, it is learnt that the Prime Minister also sent a written message to the Tiger leader. It is learnt that the LTTE leader's message invited the Prime Minister to visit Jaffna or send a representative and contained suggestions for a ceasefire and for the commencement of unconditional talks between the government and the LTTE. In her return message, it is understood that the PM has nominated former Government Agent of Jaffna and Governor of the North-east Provincial Council, Mr. Lionel Fernando, as the government's nominee to conduct preliminary talks with the LTTE, and requested Mr. Prabhakaran to nominate their representative. It is learnt that the LTTE has now nominated Mr. Tamilchelvam, the head of their political section, as their spokesman. Reporters indicate that Mr. Lionel Fernando will visit Jaffna shortly.

★ **GA CALLS FOR SAFE PASSAGE:** The Jaffna Government Agent, Mr. K. Manicavasagar has urged the government to open a safe passage by land between Jaffna peninsula and the rest of the country. Pointing out that the government was hiring ships at $3500 per day to send essential food supplies to Jaffna, he said that the opening of this safe passage would not only be greatly beneficial to civilians, but also help the government to save millions of rupees. The GA said that the journey undertaken by civilians to cross the lagoon at Kilali was hazardous, expensive and time consuming.

The GA made the appeal in the course of a meeting with Prime Minister Mrs. Kumaratunga when he handed over a 28-page memorandum outlining the current situation and containing proposals for relief measures.

★ **RESTORING ELECTRICITY:** The northern Jaffna peninsula has been without eletricity since June 1990. However, Deputy Minister of Defence, Mr. A. Ratwatte told pressmen that the government was taking steps to send as many electricity generators as possible to Jaffna pending the repair of the power station at Chunnakam, an area under the control of the Tigers. If the LTTE cooperated, the generators could be installed in six weeks. The government was also prepared to extend the national electricity grid to the north in due course Mr. Ratwatte said.

Mr. Ratwatte also said that the government wanted to send food supply convoys under the supervision of the International Red Cross by road to Jaffna as transport by ship was difficult and resulted in delay. He hoped the LTTE would cooperate in opening up a land route to Jaffna through Elephant Pass.

The government will also undertake the repair of the radio and television transmitting towers damaged during the fighting between the LTTE and government forces, Mr. Ratwatte said.

★ **THE MISSING MILLIONS:** At least $700 million is missing from Sri Lanka's national treasury according to the island's new Prime Minister who is also the Minister of Finance. 'We do not know where the money has gone. We cannot find the bottom of the well', said Mrs. Kumaratunga.

For the last eight years the Finance Ministry under which the country's Treasury operates has not balanced its books nor have they been audited by the Auditor General who is directly accountable to Parliament. The present President Mr. Wijetunga had functioned as Minister of Finance for several years until after the recent election.

The long serving Secretary to the Ministry of Finance and Treasury, Mr. R. Paskaralingam, who went abroad a month before the election to seek medical treatment, has continued to stay in London without giving any indication as to when he would return. The well known economist Mr. A.S. Jayawardene, who is reputed to be a free-marketeer, is expected to be appointed in place of Mr. Paskaralingam.

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took a good two nightmarish hours before we reached the shore, our clothes drenched, the salt spray in our faces and sand in our hair by the unsolicited 'shower bath' right through the journey. And finally we walked the last lap ankle deep in water to the shore and safety.

A vehicle met us at Kilali and we drove in the dark, the 25 miles to Jaffna letting the clothes dry on our backs. Thousands of people use this passage, the only way in and out of the peninsula suffering the same fears as I did.

What if we had been fired upon by naval gunboats. What would I a non-swimmer have done except go to a watery grave. No, I need not have been afraid. Ramesh had the most comforting answer. He would have swum me across the waters to safety.

And that was the thought I hung onto as I returned a week later across the lagoon. It was another day, but there was another Ramesh and I need not have feared.

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The Minister of Justice, Prof. G.L. Peiris, recently told a press conference that 'allegations of massive frauds, bribery and corruption by the previous regime are pouring in'.

★ **A PERMANENT BRIBERY COMMISSION:** The government is to set up a permanent Commission on Bribery and Corruption which will be vested with powers to probe assets, properties and bank accounts of wives, children and close relatives of ministers, deputy ministers, parliamentarians and governors who are suspected of bribery and corruption. The draft legislation which is to be presented to parliament shortly will also enable probing into bank accounts of persons under investigation, income tax particulars etc. The Commission could also prevent persons who are under investigation from fleeing the country. The Commission will consist of two retired judges of the Supreme Court and a third member who is conversant with discharging judicial functions.

Mrs. Nelum Gamage, who was removed a few months before the recent election by President Wijetunga from her post of Bribery Commissioner after investigating corruption charges against UNP cabinet ministers and MPs, has now been reinstated in her post.

★ **EMERGENCY RELAXED:** The state of emergency under which Sri Lanka had been ruled since May 1983, except for brief periods, has been allowed to lapse from 4 September. At the same time a separate proclamation confining the state of emergency to the war-torn northeastern areas was made by President Wijetunga.

★ **ASSASSINATION ATTEMPT:** The CID uncovered a plot to kill Sri Lanka's new Prime Minister, Mrs. Chandrika Kumaratunga by an assassin who planned to pose as a photographer. According to a report that appeared in the 3 September edition of the South China Morning Post, Hong Kong, the plan had been to assassinate the Premier while she was paying homage at the Buddhist shrine Dalada Maligawa in Kandy on 26 August. According to a CID officer, the suspect who is presently in custody had confessed that he had been provided with a camera fitted with a bomb. His instructions had been to mingle with the press corps, make his way close to the Prime Minister as possible and to 'press the shutter'. The device would have exploded blowing the PM, the would-be assassin and others nearby to pieces. 'We hope to discover the brain behind this conspiracy soon', said CID Director, Senior Superintendent Hemachandra.

★ **UNP PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE:** Despite the fact that President Wijetunga, until recently, insisted that he would be the UNP's candidate in the forthcoming presidential election, the party's executive committee which met under his chairmanship on 9 September resolved to nominate Mr. Gamini Dissanayake as it its candidate.

Political observers believe that, since the recent election, in spite of the enormous powers vested in his executive presidency, Mr. Wijetunga has become a lame-duck president and has lost any incentive he might have had previously to fight another election which he knows he would lose. This opportunity has been seized by the ambitious Mr. Gamini Dissanayake who only a few weeks earlier manoeuvred to become the Leader of the Opposition in place of the former Prime Minister Mr. Ranil Wickremasinghe.

The PA's candidate for presidency is expected to be Prime Minister Mrs. Kumaratunga. Although the PA pledged itself to abolish the executive presidency during its election campaign, introducing constitutional reforms that the PA would want to achieve, including the abolition of the executive presidency, could not be undertaken with the narrow majority it has in parliament. This inability on the part of the PA has turned out to be a blessing in disguise because, until the constitutional reforms could be enacted, Mrs. Kumaratunga if she is elected President – and no one doubts that in the present circumstances – she would be able to use the wideranging powers vested in the presidency to implement the programme of the PA including the resolution of the ethnic conflict.

★ **AIRBUS DEAL:** The government has signed a renegotiated deal with airbus Indistrie of France to buy three A340-300s airplanes for $300 million. The deal which was originally negotiated by the previous government in 1991 for the purchase of five planes for $643 million, of which $70 million had already been paid, was the subject of a great amount of controversy involving allegations of kickbacks, and criticism from the World Bank. The new government which wanted to scrap the deal altogether could not do so because it would have involved the payment of a substantial amount of compensation. As part of the new deal, Airbus has exempted the national carrier Airlanka from any penalties and compensation which would have amounted to $100 million for reducing the order.

★ **SUSPENSION OF DEALS:** The new government has suspended concluding many deals negotiated by the previous government with foreign institutions and companies, and has promised to undertake full investigation into the circumstances in which they were transacted. One such deal is with communications giant AT&T(TN) of the United States and Marubeni Corp. of Japan to install 44,200 telephone lines. Posts and Telecommunications Minister Mr. Mangala Samaraweera said that the government wanted to find out why the Rs.977 million bid by the US-Japanese combine, which was Rs.200 million more than the lowest offer, was selected over the other cheaper bids from Japanese, French and Korean firms.

Another transaction that is to be investigated is regarding the $72 million (approximately Rs.3600 million) arms deal struck with a Singaporean company to purchase secondhand Russian heavy weapons, including 210 used armoured personnel carriers, six M-17 helicopters, three cargo aircraft, two 52 metre patrol boats, three Anatov aircraft, eight transport helicoters and three high speed naval patrol craft, by a senior defence ministry official in the run-up to the recent elections. The Defense Ministry had decided to go ahead with the deal though there was no money available with the required parliamentary approval for the purpose.

★ **TELEPHONE TAPPING:** The new government has stopped the widespread practice of its intelligence agency, the National Intelligence Bureau, tapping the telephones of politicians and senior officials which has been occurring under the direction of the previous regime. The Posts and Telecommunications Minister, Mr. Mangala Samaraweera, told reporters that he had ordered his ministry staff to remove the highly sophisticated equipment used for telephone tapping by the agency.

Mr. Samaraweera said that he was startled to learn that the NIB was still using the same equipment to track and monitor politicians belonging to the current Peoples Alliance government, and a report was being sent regularly to some UNP politicians. An inquiry has been ordered into this unlawful practice.

★ **ELECTION CHALLENGE:** The Sri Lanka Muslim Congress has challenged the validity of the election held in respect of the Jaffna district. The petition filed in the name of Mr. M.A. Cader Iqbal, a candidate in the recent election for the Jaffna district, states

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'The Peace Process Has Already Started' – Prime Minister

by V. Jayanth

After 12 days in office, Sri Lanka's Prime Minister, Ms. Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga, looked under heavy pressure and strain. There was a string of appointments lined up for the day and crucial discussions fixed on the Jaffna developments. But she kept her word and spoke to *The Hindu's* Colombo correspondent on Tuesday, discussing the whole gamut of topical and controversial issues, from the peace process for the Northeast and the scrapping of the Executive Presidency, to Indo-Sri Lanka ties and the 'skeletons' that she was unravelling every day in the Finance Ministry. Excerpts from the interview:

Q: Considering the slender majority, how stable is your Government?

A: I think we will be fairly stable, even though we are remaining in power with the cooperation of several groups who do not even belong to the People's Alliance. This is because most of them realise that we honestly want to do some good to the country and solve some of the major problems, and also because the people want this Government to continue. In a democratic situation, I think most of these groups, unless we create problems for them – which we won't – will continue to support us.

Q: Are you happy with the LTTE offer to come to the peace process?

A: I don't know if this is correct. I am discussing it with the Defence services. If it is so, I am very happy.

Q: When and how do you intend starting the peace process?

A: As far as we are concerned, we have already started. The first public decision we have made is to lift the embargo on most essential items to Jaffna. About 42 items have been banned. Except for a few which go into the making of arms, we are allowing the rest to go. This is unilateral. We are not imposing any conditions on this. We are discussing how to put it into operation.

Q: When will it come into effect?

A: We have taken the decision. We are discussing the practicalities today. It is more complicated than the eye can see. At present many groups are taking a commission on these goods and this is passed on to the consumers in Jaffna. The army estimates that some armed groups are earning something like Rs. 3 millions a month on these 'taxes' and probably sharing it with certain other State officials. Even if we lift the embargo, they will not lift the taxes for the lorries to pass. We are considering other ways of sending it directly to the people.

Q: Will you be able to carry the President and the Army with you?

A: I think so. I have already spoken to the President to carry out this.

Q: You have launched cleansing exercise soon after assuming office. What have you found?

A: Horrors in the cupboards. All types of rackets of enormous magnitude. I go to the Finance Ministry every day on tiptoes, fearing what I am going to face – arms deals, Airbus deal, telecom deals in which some top people have taken billions of rupees as commissions. What is unacceptable is that if they have done something which is in the best interests of the country and the people and then taken commissions, at least they can be excused – I can't say forgiven – but almost all these deals are absolutely disadvantageous to the country and destructive of its economy. Most of the privatisation ventures have been put through by donating State assets to cronies. Neither is it capitalism nor free market economy, but collection of commissions. The State has not made one cent. They have not been given to the best persons, nor according to the tender procedures. The value has been heavily undervalued – anything from 10 to 30 times, not per cent. Government valuation is anyway lower than private estimates.

What is worse, these private parties have not come up with one cent. The State has obtained, not negotiated or guaranteed, loans from national banks and treasury bills and made them buy up State properties. The State gives a loan to a private party to buy up State property and continues to pay interest on these loans. Private enterprise has not paid anything. It is a total donation at huge cost to the State in every sense. In a few cases where the banks or the State has put on the screws these companies are cannibalising machinery and selling it on the sly to pay the money. It is a huge fraud, this privatisation of ventures, except for a few foreign companies which have bought up a few ventures. This has also been done dishonestly, but certain money has been made.

Q: By cancelling or reviewing these contracts and deals, are you not sending out a wrong signal to foreign companies and investors?

A: No, we are not cancelling them. We are reviewing the whole thing and we may re-negotiate in such a way that it will be a proper privatisation and not a donation to cronies with kick-backs to the Cabinet.

Q: Why are you not going ahead with your decision to set up a Constituent Assembly and go on with constitutional reforms?

A: We will be doing it. We have taken over only 10 days ago. I have already spoken to the Minister, Prof. Peiris. We cannot go in for a Constituent Assembly because we have not got a clear mandate. But for this system of voting, we would have got 120 seats for the Alliance alone. But we do not have it. It is not democratically enough of a mandate. We are going to start the consultative process and draw up the amendments.

Q: How do you find it working with the leader of the main Opposition party as your President and Head of Government?

A: Not comfortable. But I must say he has been very helpful in avoiding any major confrontation.

Q: You have expressed yourself very strongly against the electoral system, both before and after the election. Will you change the system?

A: Very probably we will be changing the system.

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Q: How significant was the Indian Prime Minister's special envoy's visit to convey a personal message to you? How do you see relations with India?

A: It was very significant. We appreciated it very greatly. We thought it was a very important gesture of goodwill and we see it very positively. We do not have an India-phobia like the previous government did. We are realistic in that we accept that we have a gigantic neighbour next to us and we must have good relations with her. We are off to a good start, because our party is known to have had good relations with India. We hope to restart that and have a very dynamic relationship, not just a good relationship. India and Sri Lanka have both accepted the open, free market economy, I think we can have a much more gainful and constructive relationship with India.

Q: What is your message to local industry and foreign investors who are still worried and unsure about your background and policies?

A: We are coming out with a fairly detailed statement this week because they are a bit anxious. Briefly, I will like to tell them, they need not worry. We will stand by all that we have said. The fact that we are anxious about deals which are shady, underhand and not profitable to the national interest does not mean we are going on a witch hunt against the private sector. We will review the deals so that they are more profitable to the country and the people. We still see the private sector as having a very dynamic role to play in our economy. We will be constituting consultative committees at the highest level in the Finance Ministry to make them participate in national policy planning. We are drafting an expansive set of objectives for trade, industry, fisheries and agriculture and invite private sector to participate in planning this.

Q: The Leader of the Opposition, Mr. Gamini Dissanayake has offered to cooperate with you in abolishing the Executive President. Will you accept this offer and avert another election in three months.

A: We have to take a political decision on the Executive Presidency. We have not forgotten the fact that the Leader of the Opposition, till a few hours before we were sworn in, tried his level best to prevent us from coming to power. He had this problem with the outgoing Prime Minister. We have a serious problem with his (Mr. Dissanayake's) bonafides. He has to prove that they are beyond suspicion, practically in the next few weeks to come. I personally have serious doubts about his bonafides on the country's interests.

– *The Hindu.*

Dawn of Another Era

by Prof. Bertram Bastiampillai, University of Colombo.

The announcement of a parliamentary General Election on August 16, 1994 took the electorate, the opposition and even members of the then governing party by surprise. The Presidential election was expected to be scheduled earlier and the General Election was believed to follow. However, whether it was lack of self confidence on the part of the President to give leadership in this electoral competition or whether it was owing to the times being propitious, the General Election was held on August 16 instead. But it was to prove that the twilight of the gods certainly had set in clearly.

Advantage

The run up to the General Election witnessed exceptional violence, murder and mayhem, intense competition, and bitter rivalry particularly between the United National Party that had ruled the island for 17 years and the major opposition to it, the People's Alliance or the principal constituent party to it, the Sri Lanka Freedom Party that had been out of power since 1977. Many were the 'crossover' of members from the opposition to the governing party while there were a few who on account of some discontent or other, abandoned the ruling party and moved into the opposition which was anticipated to pose a serious challenge to the incumbent administration.

Campaigning was seriously intense and ruthlessly competitive. Both contenders did not hesitate to wash 'dirty linen' in public. Rules governing practices to be followed at elections were regularly flouted and the government retained its ministry of 91 persons so that it could be a source of aid to push through the government's election campaign and pro-government party propaganda. The opposition, on the other hand, reminded the electorate of the numerous sins of omission and commission which the government had committed during the long tenure of office lasting almost 17 years and on this score more than enough was available to be recounted – arrogance, corruption and insensitivity.

At the end of this sordid period of accusation and counter accusation, the election itself passed off notably peacefully. But the results of the elections left everyone in a state of dismay, wonder and expectation. This is not so unusual in a situation where proportional representation governs the system of elections. Although proportional representation itself is laudable because it presumes that in a real democracy all sections of opinion ought to gain reprsentation in the legislature in proportion to their strength, yet it has some demerits. In other words, a majority of the electors would obtain a majority of the representatives while a minority of the voters would secure a minority of the representatives. A candidate who desires to be elected need not obtain an absolute majority of votes or a plurality but he needs only the quota which is the total number of votes divided by the number of seats.

Integrative

Even though proportional representation ensures the representation of every group in Parliament in proportion to its strength, it also has the advantage of turning Parliament to be reflective of the

composition of the nation as it should be in a democracy that regards equality to be its foundation. But the system of proportional representation nevertheless is not so useful always as a means of establishing a government. It has been noticed that in many countries which have worked proportional representation that it entails the return of a number of small parties. By making it possible for parties and groups that are small to obtain separate representation, disintegration and uncertainty are fostered.

The peril as a result is that the executive becomes a fragile coalition government which collapses at times when any coalescing section of opinion is hurt or estranged. Moreover, legislation loses coherence and creative power as it could ensue out of an enforced compromise in order to satisfy the desires of several groups. Indeed, proportional representation system encourages sectarian thinking since voters and leaders are encouraged to think according to sectional concerns more often, though it also encourages consensus building, which is healthy and integrative.

A legislative elected on a proportional representational basis tends to represent several isolated interests often, and sometimes hardly assists to form easily the general will of the nation. As a rule, scholars are against proportional representation for it could enable the organisation of disorder and 'emasculate' legislative power, render cabinets unstable, harms their homogeneity, 'and make parliamentary government impossible'.

Headway

The results of the elections have not given either the UNP or the PA, a clear working majority of at least more than three members. If any one of them is to form a government, they have not only to depend on members chosen from the national list but also they will have to depend upon other allies.

However, weighed numerically the definite edge is with the PA which is able to form a viable alliance. Moreover, being voted in as the single largest bloc, the people's wish has been made blatantly manifest and a People's Alliance-led government has emerged, and the people have to be respected as they are sovereign.

However, both the People's Alliance and the 'ruling bloc' had not performed substantially strikingly well generally at the elections. In Gampaha, Kalutara, Galle, Matara, Hambantota and even in Anuradhapura and Ratnapura, the alliance came out admirably well. The UNP was most impressive and in sway in Nuwara Eliya and Mahanuwara, but even here notwithstanding the President's intimate association with a place like Udunuwara, the UNP quite surprisingly fared ill. Yet, both 'governmental' and the competing oppositional groups had no patently clear headway so as to form a government easily.

A refreshing revelation of the election's outcome is the utter failure of the MEP, the 'Bhumiputra' sort of elements, and even the maverick independent group of Tamils appearing aberrantly in the Colombo district. Following the evidence afforded by results of Southern Provincial Council elections, the present verdict reinforces neither communal appeals nor chauvinism now pay dividends; bread and butter and clean politics are desired more. Also, the pathetic performance of the overwhelming majority of nondescript lot of independents is welcome and healthy in national politics. It is better that organised parties with ideologies and policies should displace them and the adventurous outsiders without strong position cases should get eclipsed.

Another desirable change for the smoother working of politics should come out of a modification of the present constitution. Provisions in it can inhibit cordial transitions from one government to another one which should replace the earlier one following the election results. Even the electorate's wishes can be delayed in translation to reality or thwarted according to peculiar and ambiguous provisions. The constitution is more suitable for instrumentalism and manipulation in partisan fashion. There is no clear prescription governing the inviting of a member to be PM or to form a government or to be a minister as article 43, 43 (3) and 44 show. The President being able to head the cabinet and acquire ministers becomes controversial when the political hues of the President and the elected members differ, unless desirable cohabitation is practised which is healthy.

Salutary

Here conventions, precedents and commonsense afford worthwhile guidelines. Article 3 of the constitution vests sovereignty in the people and the next article makes clear that it shall be exercised through the elected bodies. Once, therefore, people's wishes have been made manifest through an election the elected figures surely should form a government if they are numerically larger and venture to undertake the responsibility of forming a cabinet. As in India, if need arises they can be subjected to the test of a vote of confidence after a few weeks of performance if necessary. It is also known that the President gained office almost over a year ago in terms of constitutional procedure but purely fortuitously. He was not elected popularly but is expected to face the people before long in a few months so as to endeavour to gain a mandate and legitimacy. Therefore, he should work towards this unavoidable objective by enabling the people's wishes at the elections to prevail. If there is a variance in party affiliation, then there could be a peaceful and prudent 'revision to prime ministerial government with the President functioning as a constitutional head'. President Jayewardene had said 'that he would if the necessity arises, adopt such a course', (vide Wilson: 'The Gaullist System in Asia. . .' p46.208).

A disturbing feature of the elections is the number of spoilt votes. One wonders whether the system of voting poses to people an exacting task. Even in highly literate electorates such as Galle or Kalutara the rejected votes were

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incredibly and inordinately high. Commendably, however, voting took place smoothly, relatively peacefully unlike the run up to the elections; results came out quickly and clearly, and all this speaks well of the department of elections and its Commissioner. One really wonders whether in such circumstances, exotic election observers like migrant birds of foreign climes are really now needed. The Commissioner can do without them in present times and save some respectability and expenditure. Earlier the atmosphere was so disturbed and the presence of foreign observers may have added some sort of constraint on the tendency to behave regardless of healthy practice.

Of course, people will not cease to wonder that in this General Election so few have voted to elect so many in the north. This peculiar phenomenon will amaze students of elections and concerned obsevers here and abroad. Constitutional changes of a salutary nature are needed soon or else we will be practising a form of democracy and elections that will be criticised cynically. The question of bonus seats is again another sort of practice which has been viewed with disbelief, and constructive remedial measures are imperative. A hastily put up hybrid constitution is not going to effect the smooth functioning of a 'five star' democracy, and leaders should inevitably look to correction and to the spirit of democracy, and not solely and merely to the letter of the law. After all, governments best administered are better than constitutions however ingeniously drafted. There is furthermore intrinsic faith that has been proved in that the past practice of smoothly and harmoniously transferring power, even if the desire to hold onto power is corruptive, has not been betrayed in Sri Lanka, by the guardians or trustee elected by the sovereign people. And fortunately the peoples wishes have been respected.

All's well that ends well.

Ex-UNP Secretary Predicts

UNP DEFEAT AT PRESIDENTIAL POLL

Wijetunga Accused of Stabbing in the Back

Mr. Sirisena Cooray, the angry and disappointed former General Secretary of the United National Party (UNP), has lashed out at President D.B. Wijetunga and the leadership of the party for its defeat in the recent elections. Attributing the defeat to the result of repeated stabs in the back and a process of slow poisoning administered by President Wijetunga, Mr. Cooray predicts the UNP's defeat in the forthcoming presidential elections when he says: 'When we lose the Presidential polls, it will be the result of political hara-kiri by its own leader'.

Mr. Cooray was a powerful man during the regime of the late slain President Premadasa who appointed him as Party Secretary. His close and long association with the former President enabled him to have a decisive say in the affairs of the party. In fact, on his succession as President following Premadasa's assassination, Mr. Wijetunga offered Mr. Cooray the country's Premiership. He declined the offer, and in turn nominated Mr. Ranil Wickremasinghe to the post. However with the passage of time, Mr. Cooray's influence and power in the party took a nosedive and eventually he was forced to resign as Party Secretary.

Mr. Cooray was expected to be nominated to parliament as MP through the National List by the UNP following the recent election, but to his dismay he was not. The outgoing Prime Minister, Mr. Ranil Wickremasinghe's pleadings on behalf of Mr. Cooray was overruled by President Wijetunga.

Mr. Cooray, the torchbearer of the 'Premadasa Legacy', has now attributed the UNP's defeat to 'a series of blunders made by the party leadership since the assassination of President Premadasa'. The followings are excerpts from his analysis of the UNP's defeat:

The defeat of our Party, the UNP, at the recent General Elections, was needless, avoidable and yet, eminently predictable. If a sincere self-criticism and thorough-going rectification is not immediately undertaken, it will be followed by a rather more obvious defeat at the forthcoming Presidential Election. I say this both as a man who has actively served the party for over four decades and as the campaigner who organised the fight-back that took the party to electoral victory in 1988-89, at a time when the party structure had broken down completely under the murderous assault of the J.V.P.

That the UNP's defeat was needless and avoidable is best evidenced by the remarkable slenderness of the PA's victory after 17 years of UNP rule. The 44 per cent vote obtained by our Party is something of a record performance for any outgoing political party anywhere in the democratic world and more so for one which had been in office for almost two decades. Though the sequence of the elections i.e. the holding of the parliamentary poll prior to the Presidential, was, on balance a correct one, (given the weakness of our Presidential Candidate), had the timing of the election not been sprung as a rude surprise upon the party by the President and had a more democratic, consultative and consensual method been adopted in this regard, the UNP would have gone into battle better prepared. A better campaign of longer duration, by a more unified leadership and the gap of a mere 4 lakhs of votes that exist between us and the PA could easily have been bridged. This is probably the first time in the history that a snap poll has come as more of a shock to a ruling party than to the Opposition; a shock sprung by the Party leader upon his own party. One can only conclude that the party – and thereby the future of the country was cynically sacrificed by the leader, in order to test the waters, as it were. Never in the field of democratic politics, have so many and so much, been sacrificed by so few, for so little. Such may be the verdict of history. What self-serving amorality! What a heinous crime!

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It is obviously the case that the party leader had doubts concerning his chances of victory and used the parliamentary polls to test the waters – having for months, publicly stated his intentions to go for a Presidential poll! He totally reversed his stand and abruptly decided to throw the Party into a parliamentary poll. What any loyal, decent, honest leader would have done under such circumstances, was to have selected a personality capable of winning the Presidential poll in the prevailing socio-political context. Indeed this is what President Jayewardene did in 1988, when he picked Mr. Premadasa as the only candidate capable of seeing the party through. He stepped aside in Mr. Premadasa's favour, instead of sacrificing the whole party. In today's context, Ranil Wickremesinghe would have doubtless been the equivalent – the best choice to contest the Presidential elections. Instead of which, Mr. Wijetunga cynically sacrificed the party's interests and has now followed it up by splitting the party vertically by refusing to hand the Opposition Leadership to the former Prime Minister and going through with an 'internal election'.

That the UNP's defeat was avoidable is also borne out by the recent electoral victory of Mexico's ruling party, the PRI – a party that has been in office for 65 years. This gives the lie to the thesis of the inevitability of regime ouster, following a prolonged incumbency, in a democratic system.

My description of our defeat also as predictable is not a case of being wise after the event. As far back as August 1993, i.e. a full year ago, and a mere two months after the new President assumed office, I presented a confidential memorandum to him indicating certain errors that needed rectification and mapping out a course of action if the parliamentary and presidential elections were to be won. In it, I categorically stated that we faced defeat unless these course corrections were implemented. The only outcome of that confidential briefing paper was that it appeared in the *Sunday Times* without my knowledge or consent!

Our defeat was not a single event or episode, but a process. That process did not begin with the defeat of the party in the Southern Province, but with a series of blunders made by the party leadership since the assassination of President Premadasa. The opposition offensive to overwhelm, shatter and overrun the UNP administration in the days following the murder of President Premadasa was thwarted by none other than the masses, who flocked in their millions to pay their last respects to him, at Sucharitha, and at President's House. It is they, who by this peaceful yet massive manifestation of People's Power, defended and protected the UNP Government. The high point of this would doubtless have been the funeral of the late President. Knowing this, a curfew was announced, against my wishes, and the funeral procession sabotaged. Thus the mobilization of the masses was prevented by individuals in the Government and State, whose base ingratitude, spite, jealousy and pettymindedness motivated this act of sabotage. This single act gives us, in hindsight, a glimpse of the mental make-up of these persons.

I make bold to say that had the spontaneous mass mobilization been allowed to reach its zenith with the funeral procession, the UNP would have won the immediately following Provincial Council elections, including the strategic Western Provincial Council. The defeat of the UNP in the Western Province, in the South, some months later, and now in the General Elections, were the result of the downswing that commenced with the sabotage of the funeral procession of President Premadasa. In short, that was the beginning of the end.

This was followed by sabotaging, by the self-same leadership, of the proposed 17th amendment which would have facilitated the crossover of the centrist democratic elements of the SLFP. By scuttling this effort at the last moment, our leadership weakened the credibility and strength of the SLFP moderates. When they did come over later, they were fewer in number and depleted in strength. Had the 17th amendment come through at the time it was on the cards, then, we would have gone into the Southern Provincial Council elections with our ranks greatly augmented and the Opposition reeling from the psychological blow of large-scale abandonment by its centrist wing. We would have won the Southern PC Poll – averting the consequences which we are all so well aware of.

Sufficient time has elapsed since the Party's top leadership sought and received my resignation, to pose the question as to whether the choice of replacement has proved my superior or equal in the post of General Secretary. The situation that obtained during the nomination process, at which many interviewees were unknown to some of the more important members of the panel and of course the famous televised non-debate during the election campaign where all the slanderous charges hurled at the UNP government by the PA General Secretary were either evaded or agreed with, would furnish an adequate reply to this question.

Even consequent to the disgraceful campaign of vilification launched by the clownish conspiratorial elements in the Presidential Secretariat which caused me to send in my resignation as Party Secretary, in disgust, the Party leadership sought my political assistance and participation in many ways and on several occasions I was requested to manage the Parliamentary election campaign in the Western Province which I declined to do, having managed islandwide campaigns earlier. My inclusion on the National List was neither requested nor sought by me. Of course, my team and I did play a modest role in the Colombo District campaign, in support of Ranil Wickremesinghe and am delighted that he secured a record 2,91,000 votes which amounts to 75% of the total UNP vote in the District – by far the highest percentage polled by any UNP politician at this election!

I am constrained to use this opportunity to state that, contrary to rumours of distrust and disloyalty, I have served the present leadership of the party with a high degree of responsibility, discipline and loyalty. It was I who proposed that the present incumbent be the Party's unanimous choice as President, when after his automatic tenure as acting President, the Party bodies and then the Parliament had to decide on who was to complete President Premadasa's term of office. I did this, despite urging from most of my loyalists that I put myself forward for the post. During the recent election campaign, Ranil Wickremesinghe publicly disclosed that I had been offered the post of Prime Minister and that I had urged instead that it be given to him. Then again, complying with the request

made to me by President Wijetunga, I nominated the latter and secured the unanimous ratification of his name as Presidential candidate at the December 1993 Annual Conventin of our Party. The appreciation I received was in the form of seeking my resignation as General Secretary and, most recently, in the form of dropping my name from the list of National List MPs.

The disgracefully divisive device of a vote in our Parliamentary Group for the purpose of electing a Leader of the Opposition; the undemocratic thwarting of MP's right to speak up on the subject and somewhat curious – if not dubious – practices permitted and adhered to in the electoral exercise itself; the lack of transparency, verifiability and authentication in the counting of the results; all add up to a single conclusion. That inescapable conclusion is that there has been a conspiracy of long duration, the main target of which has always been Ranil Wickremesinghe, the ablest young leader in our party and real gentleman in politics. That this should happen to an invididual whose loyalty to and concern for his successive leaders is unquestionable, is an indictment of the ethics of the Party's current leadership and a move which blights the future of our party. It also frustrates the hopes of renewal and regeneration with which almost 3.5 million people voted for the UNP. Their disappointment will doubtless manifest itself electorally at the upcoming Presidential poll.

It is now clear that the campaign to force me out of the General Secretaryship and to marginalize me within the Party was with the twin, inter-related objectives of ideological and programmatic de-Premadasization and isolating and displacing Ranil Wickremesinghe. My marginalization was correctly perceived as the *sine-qua-non* for this dastardly plot, motivated by envy, prejudice, parochialism and paranoia.

To conclude: our Party's defeat at the Parliamentary elections was not the result of any inherent superiority of our political rivals, but the result of repeated stabs in the back (or, if you prefer, a process of slow poisoning) administered by its own leader! When we lose the Presidential polls, it will be the result of public political hara-kiri by its leader. I am confident though that the tide is running against the conspirators and that in the foreseeable future, the conspiracy will be overturned by the millions of party supporters, specially the poor, the women and the youth – while the conspirators will be consigned to the rubbish heap of history.'

Continued from page 8

that more than fifty percent of the displaced Muslim electors living as refugees in the electoral district of Puttalam could not vote as their names were not included in the voters list. The petition requested the Court of Appeal to declare the election of 10 Members of Parliament from the Jaffna district void. The Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF) also has challenged the validity of the election held in the Vanni district.

An Appeal for Funds

Due to the strife torn situation in Jaffna District, almost 80,000 families have been displaced and several thousands have lost their means of livelihood.

Immense suffering has been caused to the people as follows:

a. Infants and schoolgoing children suffering from severe malnutrition. Chronic malnutrition among pre-scholars has reached high levels.

b. Nutritional status of pregnant and lactating mothers has suffered severe setbacks. Anaemia and vitamin deficiency have increased two-fold.

c. Child trauma and its effects in the development of children has increased alarmingly. School dropouts have increased.

d. Mortality and morbidity on most of the environmentally dependent group of diseases, nutritional deficiency diseases and malignancy have increased.

e. Due to the prevailing state of despondency, many persons have been mentally affected.

f. In the on-going conflict, many persons have been disabled and they have to be cared for. Mainly schoolgoing children and young adults are physically disabled.

g. Displacement of people, destruction to homestead economy, setbacks in agricultural, fishing and other self-employment industries have driven a sizeable population below the poverty line.

Prominent citizens and well wishers in the District have urged me to inaugurate a fund under my Chairmanship for the welfare of the suffering families.

A deposit account has been opened and proceeds will be accounted for. The account will be administered by me under the guidance of a Board consisting of selected professionals and specialists in the respective fields.

The assistance sought is for a very deserving humanitarian purpose. Please contribute generously to alleviate the sufferings of the unfortunate people of Jaffna District.

All those willing to contribute should send their contributions to the Government Agent, Jaffna and any cheque or draft should be drawn as follows:

'Pay to the Deposit Account of the Government Agent, Jaffna for the war affected civilians'.

K. Manikawasaker,
Government Agent,
Jaffna District.

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Sixth Kanthasamy Memorial Lecture

Discussion in Dissent

Lucien Rajakarunanayake
President, Free Media Movement

Grateful and honoured as I am for being asked to deliver today's lecture in the Kanthasamy Memorial series, I must admit that my association with Mr. Kandiah Kanthasamy was indeed all too brief. However, my respect for thd driving force behind the *Saturday Review* would never diminish for my lack of knowledge of the person. Looking at it from the point of view of the journalist, much concerned about the freedom of the media, the *Saturday Review* and the people involved in it stand out as the most daring and dedicated among our profession in recent times.

Two of my very close associates in journalism were involved in producing the *Saturday Review.* They are Mr. Gamini Navaratne and Mr. S. Sivanayagam. Each one of them a forthright journalist in a class fast diminishing – two people who understood the value and need for dissent, and the necessity for the journalist to be involved in the process of dissent, and the dissemination of dissent.

Of the two, Gamini Navaratne took what we all consider the daring step of a Sinhalese editing a newspaper concerned with Tamil issues, in the Tamil heartland. Sivanayagam gave practical proof of his dedication to the cause of Tamil militancy, and his own conviction of the Tamil right to self-determination, by giving up his employment in Colombo and taking over the responsibilities of the *Saturday Review* under increasingly dangerous conditions. Both of them, no doubt, were encouraged in this by the man who we commemorate today.

In reading through the past lectures in this series I found that dissent has been a constant theme. This, I believe, is largely due to the strong advocacy of dissent by Kandiah Kanthasamy. But it must also have to do with the prevailing condition of our society, where dissent is often seen in terms of disruption, disaffection or even near treason.

Target for Vilification

My choosing of today's subject 'Discussion in Dissent' is an effort, however limited, to draw attention to the overriding limitations to dissent that exist in our society. In a sense it is a reaction to the evasion of discussion, the refusal to discuss, and the satisfaction in letting problems remain unsolved, if not being made worse, by shutting out the windows to new, varied and different opinion.

We live in times when the intellectual is often the deliberate target of vilification. There is just now a popular thesis that heaps scorn on the individual, whether intellectual or not, for the mere advocacy of minority rights. For all our claims there seems to be a refusal to accept even a change in individual opinion on public issues, without vilification for previously held views.

These attitudes, I believe, flow from the deep seated lack of appreciation of dissent and a largely held belief that nothing but good, albeit with minor warts, could come from the dominant view, the prevailing position, the *status quo*, be it in government, social organization or political process.

We are today in the midst of what appears to be a new political ferment. If we can, even with difficulty, ignore the tragi-comedy of self-centred politics which we see on both sides of the so-called political divide, one cannot ignore the fact that we are indeed at a new cross-roads of our social and political organization. But, what is the nature and content of discussion of the new realities that take place today? To the concerned observer, the answer would be a sad lacuna.

It is unfortunate that dissent, in our country, remains largely in the domain of the political parties. Parties which, within themselves, allow for very little discussion, as seen over and over again in the internal conflicts that reach the limelight. Parties, which we can now be certain, adopt policies without even the semblance of discussion, but solely for the purpose of harvesting votes or harvesting goods and favours for their members, supporters and kith and kin.

Lack of Debate

We are supposedly in the midst of a great debate about the direction of our economic thrust – the oft-quoted race, or reach, for the celebration of NIC status. We are full of the great benefits of the market-oriented economy. We hear constant reference to the collapse of the Soviet Union, the failure of the Socialist/Communist system. The Private Sector is the darling of the decade. The Public Sector is the demon, to be wished aay and removed through the exorcism of legislation. But listen to the din, and try to discover whether there is serious discussion as to how the new trends can really help our people, our society, the new generations with a whole range of new expectations. What we find in real terms, is a threatening silence.

Or, take our political system itself. The Executive Presidency is I believe a concern of a great many who have watched with alarm, the erosion of the democratic process in Sri Lanka. There was the time of the impeachment motion and its aftermath, during which it was the most spoken of political topic. We now have almost every political party, including the one which introduced the system, making statements about the need to change it. But beyond vague statements, made with the headline in mind, where do we see any serious discussion of the subject. Not even in the political parties which promise more than the moon in the matter of political change.

Instead of the great public debate which should be generated on the subject, through the political parties, the newspapers, the academic centres, the professional organizations, what one discovers is a tuneless chorus, lacking depth, about the need to change the system, but no discussion of the methodology of the change or what we should have in its stead. Each section of society which should take a lead in the discussion appears to have handed over its responsibility to others, until there is a total void where there should should have been informed exchanges of views.

The situation is reduced to farce when those who were once the most ardent advocates of an immediate end to the Executive Presidency, now say, when again close to its warm and enriching rays, that it need not be done away with so soon. The farce is made more unendurable, when the other side which promises to have nothing to do with the system, offers a candidate for the presidency whose sole purpose, it appears, is to abolish it, and that is all. What of the future we may ask. But who would dare discuss.

Trust in the Status Quo

I believe I would not be wrong if I say that by and large, our society is one which is agreed on the constant presence of dissent. Indeed there will also be some agreement on the necessity of dissent, although there could be varying positions on the extent of dissent and the manner of dissent. But the unfortunate reality is that this agreement on the presence of, and necessity of dissent, is often hidden behind the conformist positions that make up the cloak of social acceptance. It is this cloak of social acceptance which leads to what I mentioned earlier as the trust in the *status quo*. It is what leads to the frequent caution about rocking the boat.

This is a conformism born of the absence of discussion, which in its initial stage would lead to the fear of discussion. It is this absence of discussion which makes our laudable belief in dissent have no real meaning or content.

What are we ready to discuss in Sri Lankan society? Are we prepared to discuss our roots? How frankly do we discuss our past? How much do we discuss our faiths? How fully do we discuss our strengths? How often do we discuss our weaknesses? How deeply do we discuss our present, and how well do we discuss our future?

It is unfortunate that a large part of the burden of discussion in Sri Lanka has to be borne by the Press. As a member of the much criticized profession of journalism, I must admit that the Press has its own limitations in carrying out this responsibility. Firstly, we are lacking in newspapers which can reflect sufficient viewpoints. A matter which Kandiah Kanthasamy, tried to remedy in his own limited way.

Next, there appears to be an unfortunate metropolitan bias in our Press, born out of the soil in which they have grown, and, through the nature of ownership structures. What I would call a dangerously majoritarian viewpoint.

Role of 'Tabloids'

It is in this context, that one must admire, in great measure, the role played by what is respectfully called the 'alternative Press' and with contempt labelled the 'tabloid Press', in the encouragement of discussion in Sri Lanka. Whatever views one may have about the news content of these newspapers, and I for one believe that they have glaring shortcomings, but not much worse than those of the mainstream or broadsheet Press, it has to be admitted that they have added to and extended the scope and limits of discussion in Sri Lanka.

They have had the courage to test the waters for even the broadsheets by publishing news items which the latter had, but were scared to use, until the tabloids did. Pubishing mainly in Sinhalese they have had the courage to challenge the commonly held view that dissenting views about the so-called majority viewpoint on ethnic issues will find no acceptance. They have often gone to the core of corruption and have dared challenge the unbreachable privileges of corrupt citizens turned people's representatives.

It is indeed a chastening thought that had the *Saturday Review* continued publication, it would also have been labelled as part of the tabloid Press. Do we see in this contempt for the tabloid by the broad-sheet, some parallel in the attitudes to the minority by the majority?

Pet Politics and Fancies

But even with limitations faced by the broad-sheet, alias mainstream, alias national Press, it is an unpalatable truth that they have done little to encourage through their columns, the genuine and fair discussion of issues of importance. It is almost fashionable today to decry the controls and manipulations of the government in the matter of Press freedom. But the experience of most journalists will show that the Press in Sri Lanka is as much controlled by the pet politics and business schemes of proprietors and the whims and fancies of editors, as the pressures and threats of the state.

Let us take a case in point the reportage and comment on the war in the North and East. Just now, the Free Media Movement, which I am closely associated with, is conducting a series of seminars in the country on the topic of 'The War and the Media'. The reason why we started this series, is because of our conviction that there is a serious gap in the information which the public receives about the truth of this decade long war, which is sapping the strength and resources of our people and country.

Over the decades during which the ethnic crisis in Sri Lanka has grown to its present proportions, of a war between the troops of the Sri Lankan State and the armed cadres of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, the treatment of this issue by the broad-sheet Press has been one which permitted little room for honest discussion. They have stood, by and large, for the dissemination of the establish-

Continued on page 19

Parliamentary Election Results – August 1994

COLOMBO DISTRICT

People's Alliance	4,69,642	50.94%	11
United National Party	3,85,100	41.77%	9
Mahajana Eksath Peramuna	42,734	4.63%	0
Sri Lanka Progressive Front	11,454	1.24%	0
Independent Group 1	9,251	1.00%	0
Nawa Sama Samaja Party	2,050	0.22%	0
Tamil Eelam Liberation Organisation	1,113	0.12%	0
Democratic Workers Congress	589	0.06%	
Total Valid Votes	9,21,933	96.17%	
Rejected Votes	36,635	3.82%	
Total Polled	958,568	77.55%	
Registered No. of Electors	1,235,958		

GAMPAHA DISTRICT

People's Alliance	509,030	56.79%	11
United National Party	375,631	41.90%	7
Sri Lanka Progressive Front	11,627	1.29%	0
Total Valid Votes	896,288	96.39%	
Rejected Votes	11,627	1.29%	
Total Polled	92,984	81.40%	
Registered No. of Electors	1,140,808		

KALUTARA DISTRICT

People's Alliance	271,754	53.77%	6
United National Party	221,115	43.75%	4
Sri Lanka Progressive Front	6,238	1.23%	0
Mahajana Eksath Peramuna	5,914	1.17%	0
Progressive Freedom Front	339	0.06	0
Total Valid Votes	5,05,360	95.21%	
Rejected Votes	25,397	4.78%	
Total Polled	5,30,757	82.13%	
Registered No. of Electors	646,199		

MAHANUWARA DISTRICT

United National Party	3,01,824	52.34%	7
People's Alliance	2,67,683	46.42%	5
Mahajana Eksath Peramuna	3,495	0.60%	0
Sri Lanka Progressive Front	3,072	0.53%	0
Independent 1	270	0.04%	0
Independent 2	208	0.03%	0
Total Valid Votes	5,76,552	94.89%	
Rejected Votes	31,019	5.10%	
Total Polled	607,571	83.66%	
Registered No. of Electors	7,26,192		

MATALE DISTRICT

People's Alliance	1,02,680	49.85%	3
United National Party	1,00,121	48.61%	2
Independent 1	1,728	0.83%	0
Sri Lanka Progressive Front	1,433	0.69%	0
Total Valid Votes	2,05,962	94.21%	
Rejected Votes	12,646	5.78%	
Total Polled	2,18,608	84.31%	
Registered No. of Electors	2,59,271		

PARTY POSITION IN PARLIAMENT

PARTY	District List	National list	Total
Peoples Alliance	91	14	105
United National Party & CWC	81	13	94
Eelam Peoples Democratic Party	09	–	09
Sri Lanka Muslim Congress	06	01	07
Tamil United Liberation Front	04	01	05
Democratic Peoples Liberation Front	03	–	03
Upcountry Peoples Front	01	–	01
Sri Lanka Progressive Front	01	–	01
Total	**196**	**29**	**225**

GALLE DISTRICT

People's Alliance	2,77,956	56.39%	6
United National Party	2,03,268	41.23%	4
Sri Lanka Progressive Front	7,239	1.46%	0
Mahajana Eksath Peramuna	4,145	0.84%	0
Progressive Freedom Front	306	0.06%	
Total Valid Votes	4,92,914	95.95%	
Rejected Votes	20,763	4.04%	
Total Polled	513,677	81.22%	
Registered No. of Electors	632,422		

VANNI DISTRICT

DPLF	11,567	27.36%	3
SLMC	8,142	19.26%	1
UNP	7,850	18.57%	0
Peoples Alliance	5,583	13.21%	0
EPRLF	3,465	8.20%	0
TULF	3.039	7.19%	0
Independent 2	1,880	4.45%	0
Independent 1	624	1.48%	0
Independent 3	77	0.18%	0
NSSP	44	0.10%	0
Total Valid Votes	42,271	93.35%	
Rejected Votes	3,009	6.65%	
Total Polled	45,280	25.34%	
Registered No. of Electors	178,697		

HAMBANTOTA DISTRICT

People's Alliance	132,008	53.51%	4
United National Party	95,382	38.67%	2
Sri Lanka Progressive Front	15,309	6.21%	1
Mahajana Eksath Peramuna	2,080	0.84%	0
Independent Group 1	997	0.40%	0
Independent Group 2	468	0.19%	
Sinhalaye Mahasammatha Bhoomiputra	267	0.11%	0
People's Front	168	0.07%	0
Total Valid Votes	246,679	94.80%	
Rejected Votes	13,539	5.20%	
Total Polled	260,218	79.60%	
Registered No. of Electors	326,913		

MATARA DISTRICT

People's Alliance	227,285	59.90%	5
United National Party	142,024	37.43%	3
Sri Lanka Progressive Front	8,736	2.30%	0
Mahajana Eksath Peramuna	1,422	0.37%	0
Total Valid Votes	379,467	95.67%	
Rejected Votes	17,167	4.33%	
Total Polled	396,634	78.78%	
Registered No. of Electors	503,470		

BATTICALOA DISTRICT

Tamil United Liberation Front	76,516	43.95%	3
Sri Lanka Muslim Congress	31,072	17.84%	1
United National Party	23,244	13.35%	1
People's Alliance	19,278	11.07%	0
Tamil Eelam Liberation Organisation	17,073	9.80%	0
Eelam People's Revolutionary Liberation Front	4,802	2.75%	
Independent Group 1	1,547	0.88%	0
Independent Group 2	556	0.31%	
Total Valid Votes	174,088	91.80%	
Rejected Votes	15,531	8.19%	
Total Polled	189,619	72.40%	
Registered No. of Electors	261,898		

DIGAMADULLA DISTRICT

United National Party	78,767	32.71%	3
Sri Lanka Muslim Congress	31,072	17.84%	1
People's Alliance	54,150	22.49%	1
Tamil United Liberation Front	24,526	10.18%	
Tamil Eelam Liberation Organisation	4,192	1.74%	0
Independent	3,366	1.39%	0
Sri Lanka Progressive Front	673	0.27%	0
Total Valid Votes	2,40,766	94.97%	
Rejected Votes	12,736	5.02%	
Total Polled	253,502	81.24%	
Registered No. of Electors	312,006		

JAFFNA DISTRICT			
Ind. Gr. 2(EPDP)	10,744	79.71%	9
SLMC	2,098	15.56%	1
Ind. Gr. 1	374	2.77%	0
EPRLF	263	1.95%	0
Total Valid Votes	13,479	97.45%	
Rejected Votes	352	1.95%	
Total Polled	13,831	2.32%	
Registered No. of Electors	596,366		

BADULLA DISTRICT			
United National Party	182,131	54.04%	5
People's Alliance	146,546	43.48%	3
Sri Lanka Progressive Front	3,555	1.05%	0
Independent Group 2	2,601	0.77%	0
Mahajana Eksath Peramuna	1,541	0.46%	0
Independent Group 1	685	0.20%	0
Total Valid Votes	337,059	92.19%	
Rejected Votes	28,540	8.81	
Total Polled	365,599	84.00%	
Registered No. of Electors	435,260		

KURUNEGALA DISTRICT			
People's Alliance	3,66,856	51.86%	8
United National Party	3,32,547	47.01%	7
Sri Lanka Progressive Front	4,990	0.70%	0
Mahajana Eksath Peramuna	2,886	0.40%	0
Total Valid Votes	7,07,279	95.92%	
Rejected Votes	30,071	4.07%	
Total Polled	293,873	77.29%	
Registered No. of Electors	380,192		

PUTTALAM DISTRICT			
People's Alliance	1,50,605	53.64%	4
United National Party	1,27,671	45.47%	3
Sri Lanka Progressive Front	1,615	0.57%	0
Mahajana Eksath Peramuna	838	0.29%	0
Total Valid Votes	2,80,729	95.52%	
Rejected Votes	13,144	4.47%	
Total Polled	293,873	77.29%	
Registered No. of Electors	380,192		

POLONNARUWA DISTRICT			
People's Alliance	82,438	51.18%	3
United National Party	76,706	47.62%	2
Sri Lanka Progressive Front	1,934	1.20%	0
Total Valid Votes	161,078	96.16%	
Rejected Votes	6,434	3.84	
Total Polled	167,512	83.68%	
Registered No. of Electors	200,192		

ANURADHAPURA DISTRICT			
People's Alliance	1,80,454	55.18%	5
United National Party	1,42,084	43.45%	3
Sri Lanka Progressive Front	3,077	0.94%	0
Mahajana Eksath Peramuna	1,369	0.41%	0
Total Valid Votes	3,26,984	95.72%	
Rejected Votes	14,620	4.27%	
Total Polled	3,41,604	83.94%	
Registered No. of Electors	406,926		

TRINCOMALEE DISTRICT			
United National Party	34,986	29.16%	2
Tamil United Liberation Front	28,380	23.66%	1
Sri Lanka Muslim Congress	26,903	22.43%	1
People's Alliance	23,886	19.91%	0
Tamil Eelam Liberation Organisation	3,709	3.09%	
Eelam People's Revolutionary Liberation Front	881	0.73%	
Independent Group 1	608	0.50%	
Sri Lanka Progressive Front	589	0.49%	
Total Valid Votes	119,942	94.72%	
Rejected Votes	6,682	5.27%	
Total Polled	126,624	68.78%	
Registered No. of Electors	184,090		

KEGALLE DISTRICT			
United National Party	203,938	51.24%	5
People's Alliance	190,689	47.91%	4
Sri Lanka Progressive Front	3,383	0.85%	0
Total Valid Votes	398,010	95.89%	
Rejected Votes	17,043	4.11%	
Total Polled	415,053	82.85%	
Registered No. of Electors	500,947		

MONERAGALA DISTRICT			
People's Alliance	77,955	50.40%	3
United National Party	67,753	43.81%	2
Independent Group 4	6,592	4.26%	0
Sri Lanka Progressive Front	1,896	1.23%	0
Independent Group 5	207	0.13%	0
Independent Group 2	106	0.07%	0
Independent Group 1	90	0.06%	0
Independent Group 3	64	0.04%	0
Total Valid Votes	154,663	90.46%	
Rejected Votes	16,305	9.54	
Total Polled	170,968	85.75%	
Registered No. of Electors	199,391		

RATNAPURA DISTRICT			
People's Alliance	2,33,687	50.77%	6
United National Party	2,20,750	47.95%	4
Sri Lanka Progressive Front	2,330	0.50%	0
Mahajana Eksath Peramuna	1,634	0.35%	0
Independent 1	1,555	0.33%	0
Independent 3	202	0.04%	0
Independent 2	127	0.02%	0
Total Valid Votes	4,60,285	95.12%	
Rejected Votes	23,611	4.87%	
Total Polled	483,896	87.25%	
Registered No. of Electors	554,607		

Continued from page 17

ment point of view, which is a wholly majoritarian view. Mass circulation newspapers have often made themselves the champions of single viewpoints, often pouring scorn on the views held by those with other views.

Right to Reply

The right of reply, which is the essence of dissent, and more particularly of discussion in dissent, is often ignored. When published, replies are often truncated. Debates are stopped when the favoured view of the newspaper is too much under challenge, and the curt editor's note used more often like the closure motion in a parliamentary debate.

The letters columns in newspapers published both in the Sinhala and English languages, are used not for the interesting and often stimulating discussion they could lead to, but rather to peddle archaic thinking, dangerous prejudices and heap ridicule on proponents of points of view in favour of a more realistic interpretation of history. Even editorial comments get tainted with references even to the physiognomy of those holding other views. In one recent instance, a leading Sinhala newspaper even allowed the use of caste, as a weapon to vilify a person holding a different viewpoint.

Over the years there has been the least discussion in the mainstream or broad-sheet Press of the realities of the war. The concurrent reality of the war, which is the creation of refugees, and the plight of these refugees have been ignored in the main, except at the outset of a major event, which leads to a refugee problem. One cannot help but recall how very influential sections of our Press lamented the fact that our people were being made refugees in their own country when the Sinhalese were being driven out by the brutality of the Tamil Tigers, while not using the same description on the many previous occasions when Tamils were driven out of their homes, largely by the thuggery of the State.

There is, an apparent conspiracy of silence, which links the metropolitan based broad-sheet Press, when it comes to the discussion of the ongoing war and its own causes, crises and consequences. Over the years, what many critical students of journalism describe as the National Security Syndrome, has taken over our major newspapers, clouding their function of accurate reportage and their role as leaders of discussion, with a mistaken commitment to official interpretions of national security.

(Continued in next issue).

India-Pakistan Relations

A Mood of Belligerence

by T.N. Gopalan

There is a distinct mood of belligerence in the relationship between India and Pakistan. Not that war is in the air or that the ties had been harmonious in the past. Nevertheless the hawkish postures of both the parties, talking of completing the 'unfinished agenda' of Partition and so on, are indeed disquieting.

What seems to have missed the attention of many observers is the unusually aggressive tone of some recent statements of the Indian Prime Minister P.V. Narasimha Rao. To be more precise while the muscle-flexing tone of Mr. Rao's Independence Day address has indeed been seen as an attempt to usurp the plank of the communalist Bharatiya Janata Party, none has sought to put it in the proper perspective, read it in the context of recent developments including the almost definite suspension of the supply of F-16 fighter planes to Pakistan, the arrest of Yakub Memon in connection with the serial bomb blasts in Bombay last year and his implicating the Inter-Services Intelligence of Pakistan, all evidently in an attempt to get Pakistan declared a 'terrorist state', unseemly incidents in both the countries involving career diplomats, and the easing of the US pressure on India on Kashmir. Indeed it looks like India might not fight shy of provoking a limited war.

This is an entirely new phenomenon. In the past, except for the Bangladesh war of 1971 (which is on a very different footing altogether) the other conflicts could be said to have been caused by the adventurist policies of Pakistan. But this time round, what with Pakistan losing its value as the front paw of the US and India having a Prime Minister who would not mind sullying his party's secularist image or even generating dangerous tensions in the polity for short-term electoral gains, the portents are somewhat ominous.

Indeed so much has been the brouhaha over the so-called Action Taken Report (ATR) on the recommendations of the Joint Parliamentary Committee which went into the securities scam of last year that not much attention has been paid to the disturbing developments on the Indo-Pak front.

Mr. Frank G. Wisner, the new US Ambassador to India, in a newspaper interview in the second week of August, categorically,, almost gratuitously, for the questioner himself did not raise the matter, ruled out the supply of F-16s to Pakistan.

He said: 'At some point there was some consideration in the White House that to slow the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and their delivery systems, there was a need to strengthen the conventional strength of Pakistan. This is the context in which the possible delivery of F-16s was considered. But as a matter of practicality that transfer is now not going to take place. . .'

Subsequently a US State Department spokesman explained that Washington could still deliver 38 F-16s Islamabad had already paid for if only it agreed to abandon its nuclear programme.

All that Pakistan could do was to put on a brave face and demand the US return 650 million US dollars it had remitted towards the F-16s.

Evidently Pakistan has refused to accept a formal capping of its enrichment without getting a similar commitment from India. What else could the government of Mrs. Benazir Bhutto do? 'We'll eat grass but make the bomb', her father had thundered once. She cannot dare strike a different path.

But then times have changed. Whatever Benazir's own personal predilections of internal political compulsions, the external environment is not at all propitious enough for Pakistan to play up the Red card and wheedle all kinds of weaponry from the West. There is no need anymore for the US to prop up Pakistan in the name of countering the Communist menace.

In fact but for some noise made by the US State Department on the human rights situation in Kashmir, the White House seems to have lost all interest in using Pakistan to needle India. The acerbic Ms. Raphael, the State Department Assistant Secretary, has become more conciliatory these days.

Mr. Wisner, who has taken over a job which remained vacant for over a year, seems to be bending backwards to please India.

In a television interview, he felt that it might not be 'wise' for his country to support the demand for a plebiscite on Independence to Kashmir. He did say that the will of the people of Kashmir should be taken into account, but went on to clarify that he did not have plebiscite in his mind when he made that statement. Rather, he said, 'there are normal political processes. . .and that is for India and the people of Kashmir to work out. . .'. Was he meaning elections then? 'Well, normal political processes can constitute a number of outlets. . .Election, clearly, is one possibility. . .'. The Rao regime is planning for elections in Kashmir shortly.

There you have a new US, careful not to tread on the toes of India. Why would it, when it did not press ahead with its avowed human rights concern in the case of China? If the latter was holding out fascinating prospects for the not-in-the-pink-of-health-US-economy, more so is the situation in India, in fact much more liberal and amenable to an occasional arm-twist or two

But it is not as if the US wants to play ball with India only because of economic reasons. No, the major factor at work is the concern of the West over the issue of terrorism – after all it is the

Islamic fundamentalist variety which has the greatest destabilising potential.

A recent report of the Task Force on Terrorism and Unconventional Warfare of the United States House Republican Research Committee spoke of the nexus between Pakistan's ISI on the one hand and Libya and Sudan on the other, the latter two countries generally painted as the most dreadful promoters of international terrorism.

The report reveals the names of the outfits in Kashmir enjoying ISI's patronage, even of the ISI officers providing the training to the militants and talks of the training received by the Kashmir desk of the ISI at the hands of the Libyan and Sudanese experts.

In this scenario came the sensational arrest of Mr. Yakub Memon, brother of Tiger Memon, the No.1 accused in the ghastly explosion in Bombay on March 12, 1993 which claimed 257 lives, injured 713 persons and destroyed property worth Rs.27 crores.

Though the Bombay police had been maintaining the ISI hand was behind the blasts, no clinching evidence was available – till the arrest of Yakub.

He is reported to have told the CBI interrogating team that a Karachi-based mafia don, Taufik Siddique Jaliawala, was the main ISI agent who 'co-ordinated with the authorities based in Dubai (an apparent reference to the notorious Indian smuggler Dawood Ibrahim, now in exile) and in Bombay on behalf of Pakistani authorities' and thus was the moving force behind the serial blasts.

He is spilling a lot of beans, and the CBI is issuing daily press releases on his confessions. Naturally the Indian government and the media is going to town on the Pakistani involvement in the dastardly deals.

Even as this kind of a bitter scenario was developing, Pakistan Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto chose to offer her country's co-operation with the US on the issue of non-proliferation – during the course of her Independence Day address, if only the latter could 'understand and accommodate' (to) Pakistan's viewpoint that its security interests were linked to the 'unfinished agenda of the Partition' of the Indian subcontinent and the unsettled political status of Jammu and Kashmir.

Evidently Ms. Bhutto was referring to the Pakistan demand for integration of Kashmir with itself. Some portions of Kashmir are already under its control and if the rest too was detached from the Indian union and ceded to Pakistan, the Partition agenda would be 'complete'.

Having failed to get the UN Commission on Human Rights in Geneva to indict India on the Kashmir issue some time ago, now faced with some damaging revelations on the Bombay blasts, and facing some turbulent times in the Sind province where the Urdu-speaking immigrants from India are clashing with the Sindhis and Punjabis, Ms. Bhutto would perhaps like to shore up her popularity by indulging in some sabre-rattling. The UN General Assembly is due to meet next month and Pakistan's membership of the Security Council is to expire in December. By intensifying her anti-India campaign, she might be hoping to score a point or two.

But then she does not seem to have gauged properly the current international mood or even the Indian public opinion. Or, if she is bent on provoking a war, the present Indian government would gladly go for the jugular with the people solidly behind it. Mr. Clinton or any other western leader is unlikely to bale her out.

Predictably her Indian counterpart hit back strongly the very next day, in his Independence Day address from the ramparts of the Red Fort. He retorted that the only unfinished agenda was the restoration of Pakistani-occupied Kashmir.

Vowing to finish off terrorism even while urging Pakistan not to spurn India's hand of friendship, he told Ms. Bhutto and company, without mincing words, 'with you, without you and in spite of you, Kashmir will remain part of India,' and came in for a lot of praise from the 'patriotic' media.

Playing upon the 'nationalistic feeling' further, Mr. Rao declared that India's missile programme would continue and there would be no cut in its defence expenditure irrespective of what others had to say about 'a changing world'. 'There is an uproar when we test our missiles, but no one says anything about the presence of missiles on the shelf of others (read Pakistan). . . '. He argued that India's defence requirements emanated from its size and hence, etc. Incidentally, he also announced better emoluments and service conditions for the soldiers.

By seeking to put Pakistan on the mat and steering clear of the Ayodhya controversy – he is yet to redeem his pledge to the Muslims to rebuild the demolished mosque in the same area if not in the same site – he has only appropriated the electoral agenda of the BJP, say many observers. But they prefer to close their eyes on the incipient tone of adventurism, something rather unexpected of the proverbially indecisive Mr. Rao.

As for Pakistan, miseries do not seem to come in 'single spies, but in battalions'. Barely a few days after the arrest of Yakub Memon and the desperate appeal of Ms. Bhutto to the US, came yet another sensational revelation from a totally unexpected quarter, Bonn. The German justice authorities and security services announced that during a major police sweep across Berlin, four persons including a Pakistani national had been taken into custody for allegedly colluding to transport nuclear material – smuggled out from Russia – to Pakistan.

'The documents create the suspicion that plutonium has already been transported to Pakistan or that the shipment has been planned', it was said.

The German authorities have seized four batches of weapon-grade nuclear material in the last four months including the two in the last fortnight or so, and the entire quantity of plutonium could apparently be traced to the facili-

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READERS FORUM

MODERATION PLEASE

SIR – it has been quite some time since I last wrote to you. But I felt that I have to raise an issue which has been irking me for quite some time. To encourage young Tamil musicians and dancers, you have been regularly publishing 'propaganda blurbs' about their recent stage performances. I label these as 'propaganda blurbs', because I find it difficult to call them as reviews.

In these blurbs, every performance is extolled in superlative adjectives as nothing deviating from perfection. Almost every musician is dubbed as an equal to M.S. Subbuluxmy or Maharajapuram Santhanam or T.R. Mahalingam or Palgahat Mani Aiyar. And almost every dancer is described in these blurbs as one who is faultless like Balasaraswathi and who has the grace of Padma Subrahmanyam.

Can anyone take these blurbs seriously? First, they provide no proper assessment for the artist to improve his or her weakness in skills. Secondly, they reveal the sheer ignorance about Karnatic Music and dance, of those who write these self-serving features. Thirdly, they insult the intelligence of the readers who know something about Tamil arts. If one cannot take them seriously, can any of those who contribute these blurbs tell me for what meaningful purpose do they indulge in writing such blurbs? I don't expect these writers to pen reviews like a Subbudu, but at least they can practice some moderation in their praise.

So that some of these reviewers may challenge my credibility on questioning their writings, I feel compelled to state briefly that my credentials in karnatic music include, being a radio artiste in flute in Sri Lanka (1972-81), concert artiste (1963-81) and an author of *Thamil Isai Theepam* book, published in 1977.

Sachi Sri Kantha,
Osaka 565 Japan.

Momentum of Hope

'In the meantime the great news of Chandrika and the Peoples Alliance assuming power. I am in a way glad that they have to rely on the minorities to get a majority. That gives Chandrika a good argument and an opportunity to push ahead with a political solution.

'Here the atmosphere created by the Tigers was all of disinterest: "these elections are not important for us Tamils, because both major parties will not deliver the goods". Later this attitude changed and when Chandrika was elected, they showed large-size pictures of her oath-taking ceremony. And an editorial in Eelanatham concluded that there had been a clear shift in the attitude of the Sinhalese masses and that this could be demonstrated by looking at the election result with 69,000 preferential votes cast in favour of Vasudeva Nanayakkara in Ratnapura who was the most pronounced advocate of meeting the Tamil demands, and behold he was elected with a large majority.

'The common people here have got some hope that now things will

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A Significant Book

BOOK REVIEW

N. Ram, Editor, *Frontline.*

My Presidential Years. by R. Venkataraman, Indus, an imprint of Harper Collins Publishers India, New Delhi, 1994 **Rs.395.**

Not only is former President R. Venkataraman (RV) fully entitled to his freedom of expression in his presidential memoirs; he has, beyond question, served the people's right to know in giving us *My Presidential Years* within a couple of years of leaving the Rashtrapati Bhavan. It is an unadorned, factually serviceable and, in the main, objective narrative of a tumultuous chapter in the history of independent India – the period 1987-1992 which witnessed two general elections, a promising but short-lived political change, the travails of four governments, extensive communal trouble, and a major assassination. Indeed it appears that the only event of portentous significance that did not take place when RV was in the Rashtrapati Bhavan was the vile and barbaric demolition of the Babri Masjid by the organised forces of Hindu communalism.

Very properly, the book begins with a disavowal of any claim to be regarded as 'the contemporary history of India' during RV's presidential years. It addresses only matters with which he was connected 'in one form or another'; it does not throw light on various issues of national importance he was not involved in during this period.

There are two or three virtues about this book which place it above most politicians' memoirs, which are as often as not ghosted (or at least collaborative) and are, as a rule, unreliable and self-serving. The first virtue is that this is a book written by the former President himself, in his own long hand, backed of course by research, fact-checking and editorial assistance. The narrative voice is that of RV speaking, not posturing, through most of the 670-plus pages.

This brings us to the second virtue, the essentially contemporaneous registration of fact, insight, detail and nuance in *My Presidential Years*. Reviewers and newspaper editorials have criticised the extended diaristic treatment that is the book; some have suggested that a removal of the chaff from the wheat, a separation of the formal from the interesting, would have served the reader better. This is a legitimate criticism, but then one can always write another's book for him or her in a more interesting or better organised way.

Any serious historian will recognise the advantage presented by RV's narrative method which is diaristic and essentially free from interpolation. It is enlivened by some insight, a few semi-naughty comments the writer thought he could get away with, the occasional note of sharp criticism and sarcasm, and a touch of speculation. There are not too many, but enough, lines in the book that can and should be read between.

RV was by no means the most distinguished or the best President India has had. But in most fair reckonings, he fitted quite well the role he saw himself cast in; he served the system without arousing too much controversy, divisiveness or anxiety, considering the frequently hot ringside seat he occupied while in the Rashtrapati Bhavan.

The central theme of the book is his strict constructionist view of the presidency. According to this, the President has the right to know about the affairs of state and indeed of the polity, to be heard on all manner of issues, to be liberal in appearance and able to consult widely and eclectically, to interact closely with the executive and, in particular, with the Prime Minister. But that is about all. A constitutional, as opposed to an adventuristic, President must not deviate from the narrow path laid out for him in the Constitution. He must not take the slippery route of being guided by its 'spirit'. He must not claim any substantive powers, must not tread into any area suggesting the potentially arbitrary use of presidential authority.

In other words, the President must be above temptation – the temptation of imagining himself (there is no herself yet in the history of the Indian republic) clothed with real powers in any situation. He must take his severe constitutional limitation, but not his 'Powers', seriously. Not to put too fine a point on it, this is a conception of the head of state as a substantive non-entity – except in extreme situations relating to a collapse of governing arrangements at the Centre.

This is not an elevating view of the presidency, but it will have to suffice in the absence of a practical demonstration in the Rashtrapati Bhavan of anything significantly different or better. From the few dangerous flashes of near-confrontation witnessed between the President and the Prime Minister over the decades, one can assert that the kind of head of state RV tirelessly posits and argues for in *My*

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ties in the erstwhile Soviet Union. With the system collapsing, corruption rampant and criminal gangs on the rampage, nuclear material, weighing around 1500 tonnes according to some estimates, is up for grabs in Russia and Ukraine, Belarus, Kazhakastan and so on. The frightening proportions of the peril at hand could be realised from the fact that hardly four kg of plutonium would be needed to make a bomb like the ones dropped over Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The West is in jitters at the prospect of blackmail and worse by terrorist gangs.

Of course both Russia and Pakistan hotly deny their involvement but not many would buy their averments, especially when one remembers some daring smuggling and poaching have marked Pakistan's bomb project right from the beginning.

In whatever shape Pakistan comes out of this latest scandal, the present conjuncture seems especially adverse to it. But nothing could be more disastrous for the sub-continent if the neighbouring regime finds it opportune to take advantage of the situation and go for a military strike, hoping to reap some electoral gains in the process.

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Presidential Years is preferable to an interventionist President, a political adventurer India can very well do without. Imagine T.N. Seshan in the Rashtrapati Bhavan.

Anyone who met RV in his presidential years noted his generally liberal outlook, his accessibility and geniality, and his willingness to offer insights and views relating to a range of national and international subjects. Like some other journalists, I had the opportunity of meeting him at the Rashtrapati Bhavan to discuss various matters: the issues included Bofors, the Defamation Bill, Tamil Nadu political developments, China and Sri Lanka. On one occasion, I felt I had been unfair to him in an editorial; this related to the unedifying happenings in Tamil Nadu following the death of Chief Minister M.G. Ramachandran in late 1987. On Bofors I found RV superficially interested, but non-committal; he was clearly opposed to the anti-press Bill of 1988; and on China and Sri Lanka he was forward-looking as well as forthcoming. I particularly remember the quite specific perspective of better bilateral relations he laid out before me on the eve of Rajiv Gandhi's China visit in December 1988.

On economic policy issues, it is clear from the references in the book as well as from other sources that RV has been no admirer of the new economic policies of the Narasimha Rao Government, or of Manmohanomics (although he has much affection and respect for Dr. Manmohan Singh). One wishes he had been more forthcoming about this in his memoirs. The bottom line is that he has more time for economic sovereignty and self-reliance than the present Congress(I) dispensation, and is correspondingly less enamoured of IMF-World Bank recipes and indeed of the transcendental virtues of market forces.

As for leaders, political parties and policies, RV is experienced and discerning, even if (as in the case of Prime Minister Chandra Shekhar) he sometimes manages to apply the lowest possible standards he can get away with as President. He is fair to both V.P. Singh and Rajiv Gandhi as heads of government and parties. But beneath the thin salve of praise he applies to the posthumous reputation of the latter, he cannot help communicating his better judgment that Rajiv was neither discerning nor competent as Prime Minister.

Rajiv, for all his youthful charm and winsome ways, was not really up to it: this is the RV judgment, impossible for any intelligent reader to miss. There are plenty of lines to read between so far as Rajiv Gandhi and his tragically cut-off political career are concerned.

Although Venkataraman, first as Vice-President and subsequently as head of state, was sometimes criticised, quite correctly, for tilting towards the ruling party, he clearly rated Rajiv better as Leader of the Opposition than as Prime Minister. Small wonder that those Rajiv fanatics to whom intolerance is second nature have pounced upon the former President for daring to suggest – and in an unguarded moment during a video magazine interview coming close to saying – as much.

But having noted all this, one must call attention to some serious weaknesses and flaws in the RV performance in the presidency; these are, in some measure, evidenced in the book. On Bofors he proved quite insensitive to the central question of corruption at the top. This issue was both moral and political, but President Venkataraman seemed to treat it mostly as a challenge to political skills, as a management or rather a public relations problem. His judgment that 'had Rajiv Gandhi come to the House on the first day when there was a rumpus in Parliament over the report of a private Swedish radio broadcast on the Bofors gun deal deal and accepted a parliamentary probe, he would have been saved all the subsequent tribulations' is not just naive and shallow; it is seriously damaging from the ethical standpoint of combatting corruption and wrongdoing in public life.

His rejection, very much at his own discretion, of Shanti Bhushan's application to grant sanction to prosecute the Prime Minister for corruption and bribery relating to Bofors was clearly biased towards the ruling party and Rajiv Gandhi. (So too was his March 20, 1987 decision to rule out, as Chairman of the Rajya Sabha, any discussion of the Zail Singh-Rajiv Gandhi fracas over the President's right to information). His understanding of the value of the documents published in the press, in the context of an official cover-up, set a bad precedent. It is hard to believe that what he presents in the book as his understanding of *l'affaire* Bofors is his real understanding as an experienced politician, as a former Finance and also Defence Minister, and as head of state. The most charitable thing that can be said about RV's presidential response to the Bofors scandal is that he does not apply anything like high ethical standards to the issue of corruption.

RV might be proved right in his prediction that the days of single party rule at the Centre are decisively over, but his 1990-91 obsession with the idea of a national government had, fortunately, no serious takers. An all-inclusive government lacking even the pretence of a common platform or programme would have been the most opportunist and misconceived of solutions to the crisis of political stability.

On Jammu and Kashmir, he floated a way-out idea that was positively dangerous. According to his own evidence (pp.349-350) of the book), he suggested to Prime Minister Indira Gandhi in 1983 the vivisection of the State, with Ladakh made a Union Territory, Jammu a new state, and the Kashmir Valley 'a separate entity'. In 1987, after a visit to Ladakh, he canvassed for elements of the old suggestion with Rajiv Gandhi, who fortunately ignored it as his mother had done.

RV's appreciation of the value of federalism, and the issue of Centre-State relations, is seriously flawed. He has no compunction in going along with, and in the process justifying, the uses the knife of Article 356 has been put to by an anti-federal Centre. He rationalises the indefensible act of dismissing the elected DMK government in Tamil Nadu in January 1991. He does not give any weightage to the intent of the Constitution-makers or to the balanced views expressed by the Sarkaria Commission. There were, in fact, to be upheld by the Supreme Court in its historic Article 356 judgment of March 11, 1991.

However, the area in which RV seems to fare the worst is the fight against politically mobilised communalism, the defence of secularism against its sworn enemies. On the Ayodhya issue, his suggestion made to both sides in October 1991 was that 'the monument Ram Janma Bhoomi/Babri Masjid may be *shared by both the communities*', with the central tower (where the Ram idols were located) and the right tower going to the Hindu organisations while the left tower 'may be protected by government under the Ancient Monuments Preservation

Act and maintained as a historical place' (p653).

RV held to this thoroughly compromising and anti-secular proposal, this appeasement of naked Hindu communalism, even after his retirement. He failed publicly to condemn the demolition in December 1992; however, in the book he describes the act as 'a shame on our ancient culture,' adding erroneously that 'Indian history has no record of a Hindu ever destroying a religious place either of his own or of any other faith' (p.654).

Although he calls attention in the book to his impeachable secular credentials and also to his passion against untouchability, his closeness to the Kanchi math and to Sri Jayendra Saraswati Sankaracharya in particular predisposes him to a soft saffron position on several matters. For example, on page 101 of the book, he states his untenable ahistorical view, mandated by the Kanchi math, that Adi Sankara was born not in the eighth century A.D., but before the birth of Christ. As President, RV anxiously advises Karan Singh to consult the senior Kanchi Sankaracharya before launching the 1200th anniversary celebrations.

Had RV been President in late 1992, when the Babri Masjid was demolished, it is unlikely that he would have come out with the ringing public condemnation and uncompromising secular stand that his successor, Dr. Shankar Dayal Sarma, did.

For all this, *My Presidential Years* is an absorbing and durable record of RV's strengths and failings as a President. It is also a useful disquisition on the idea of a strict constructionist, non-substantive presidency, what its critics might call a 'rubber stamp' headship of state. Its success at bookshops across the country is certainly well merited.

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Death – Reward for Free Expression

LAJJA – SHAME

Hounded by religious fundamentalist extremists and subjectd to a 'fatwa' carrying a reward for her execution for the alleged crime of blasphemy, the Bangladeshi woman writer Dr. Taslima Nasdrin has gone into enforced exile to Sweden.

What provoked the fanatics was her 77-page novel 'LAJJA', meaning SHAME, written in the wake of the atrocities committed against the Hindu minority living in Bangladesh, numbering nearly 20 million, following the destruction of the Babri Masjid mosque in Ayodhya in northern India in December 1992.

Reproduced here (courtesy of *South Asian Affairs*) is a synopsis of the novel which has been banned in Bangladesh, many other Muslim countries and some non-Muslim countries like Sri Lanka. 'Hounded Out – The Case of a Woman Writer' plus reviews of Dr. Nasrin's novel will appear in the next issue of *Tamil Times*.

Lajja starts abruptly on 7th December 1992, a day after the demolition of the Babri Masjid in Ayodhya, India. The novel opens with Maya, younger sister of Suranjan pressing him to get out of his bed and do something about the security of the family. In the deliberations within his mind Suranjan is irritated and hurt that his friends, Kamal and Rafiq, don't have to hide like rats in a hole and suffer from the same feelings of indignity and insecurity.

He curses the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) in Indian for their insensitivity to the fate of 20 million Hindus in Bangladesh alone and milliOns more in neighbouring countries of the region, and yet claiming to be the champions of the Hindu cause. The BJP should know India is not an island. Reactions to the riots in India are going to threaten the lives of Hindus in neighbouring countries and the world.

He reminisces how his father, a medical doctor and medical college assistant professor, could never become associate professor because of subtle discrimination. Statistics tell him that in some areas Hindus have even fallen behind what they achieved in the days when East Bengal was a part of Pakistan. Hindus had hoped to enjoy political, economic, social and religious freedom in a secular independent Bangladesh. The promise of a secular people's democratic state had been reneged by passage in the Bangladesh Parliament of the Eighth Amendment to the Constitution, which declared Islam as the state religion. The fundamentalists who had opposed the liberation of Bangladesh and gone underground in its aftermath are now on the upswing. Now once again bold and visible they had taken part in the October 1990 riots and atrocities against the minority Hindus.

Suranjan's father, Dr. Sudhamoy Dutta, who may be seen as the actual hero of this book, was 17 at the time of the partition of India. He refused to go over to India leaving his ancestral home, hearth and roots to become a refugee in the Sealdah Railway Station of Calcutta. He had taken active part in the 1952 movement for recognition of Bengali as a national language and marched on the streets of Dhaka on February 21, along with the immortal Rafiq-Salam-Barkat. He also had taken part in the movements of 1964 and 1969 for restoration of democracy when East Pakistan stood eye to eye with General Ayub Khan, before Ayub winked and gave in to their demands. Dr. Dutta took active part in early preparations for the 1971 uprising, and refused to join the exodus to India. He, however, could not join the Mukti Fauj, as he had been picked up by the Pakistan army and physically mutilated to be unfit for the war. For the next six months the family had to masquerade as Muslims and hide in a Muslim friend's village home just to save their lives. Their own house was looted while they were away. The advent of Bangladesh promised a land free of minority persecution, but it was never realized.

Suranjan's sister Maya, was kidnapped at the early age of six by

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village hoodlums. The family received no help from the police or the administration. Later Maya was returned. Though physically unharmed, she was totally psychologically shattered. It took her many years to get over the psychosis of fear and sleep peacefully at night. In the aftermath of this incident Suranjan's father sold their ancestral house worth 1 million taka for a mere 200,000 taka to a neighbour and left for Dhaka, hurt by repeated threats and looting during unstable times. Today the only property once prosperous Dr. Sudhamoy Dutta has are his two children.

While Suranjan reminisces, his sister Maya refuses to accept his inaction and goes away to a close Muslim friend's house. Before leaving she informs her parents that to save her life she is prepared to convert and she even has a Muslim name 'Feroza Begum' ready for such an eventuality. The family becomes concerned because they know Maya is in love with a young man named Jahangir, two years her senior in the university. Suranjan's own experience was bitter. His beloved Parveen did not accept his refusal to convert to Islam. She finally got married to a Muslim businessman of her family's choice.

Finally after Maya leaves, Suranjan gets up from bed, comes to the dining room and hears the slogan of a passing procession, which translated means 'catch one or two Hindus daily and make breakfast of them in the morning and tiffin in the evening'. Suranjan remembers the destruction of October 1990 and relives the horror. He says to himself this is not a communal feud! It's the unhindered oppression of the powerful majority over the weak minority. He becomes very angry.

Suranjan, having grown up in an honest, liberal, secular household had more Muslim friends than Hindu and found no difference among them. Even the girl he loved, a friend's sister, was a Muslim, and his family did not object. As a child he never understood the origin of hate and consequent indignity to which he was subjected. As a child for a long time he believed calling someone Hindu was like cursing. He remembered how his sister, being the only Hindu girl, felt left out in the religion class that was compulsory. To his secular father it appeared unreasonable to teach religion compulsorily in school. But Dr. Dutta's suggestion to teach children the sayings and writings of great men was not accepted.

Suranjan had always been politically active. He even won election to the college union as joint secretary.

The author's camera suddenly moves to the 8th of December when the Jamaat-i-Islami appropriates a call for a general strike by their opponents (The Killers and Collaborators Annihilation Committee) to protest against the Babri Masjid demolition. Suranjan gets out on the streets on this dangerous day as a kind of protest. He is surprised to see that teenage neighbourhood youth, whom he otherwise knew as nice kids and who came to him for help at other times, were shouting from a distance: 'Catch the Hindu, catch the Hindu!'

As he walks around the streets of Dhaka he sees the office of the Communist Party of Bangladesh (CPB) burnt to ashes. The Jamaat-i-Islam boys had even burnt some familiar shops vending radical books. His friend Kaiser warns him of the danger and gives him details of the atrocities committed by the Jamaati cadres. Kaiser tells him that not only have they burnt many temples and places of worship, but they have burnt the huts of poor fishermen in Majhirghat.

Suranjan then proceeds to the Press Club of Dhaka, the intellectual hub of the city. He is upset by their concern for him just because he is a Hindu. He feels very offended when Lutfer, an old protege of his, comes and asks him about his well being and advises him to take shelter in a safe house of a Muslim neighbour. He walks through the deserted streets of Dhaka and sees the destruction for himself. He realizes these acts of arson have nothing to do with religion, but are the acts of the strong, the goons against the weak and the vulnerable.

A strange change comes over Suranjan as he decides to visit his Hindu friends. Pulak and his wife are surprised to see him. They narrate to him the plight of Pulak's son whose regular playmates had stopped playing with him per advice of the local Moulavi. He then visits poet Nirmalendu Gun whose only cover is his Moulavi-like beard and who is trying to play it cool.

After loitering all day, he returns home to find his father down with a paralytic stroke. A local Muslim doctor, Dr. Samad, comes to his house, but to Suranjan's amazement, violating medical ethics, accepts a fee. Now the over-sensitive mind of Suranjan is deeply hurt. He finds Maya still away from home in the shelter of some Muslim friend. He suspects she might become Muslim to avoid the insecurity of a minority life, which he thinks is selfish and undignified.

His close friend Haider, an active Awami Leaguer, visits Suranjan. Suranjan asks him questions regarding the Eighth Amendment, knowing fully well what is Haider's opinion, and finally provokes Haider into an animated argument by commenting: 'maybe Pakistani rule was better.' An agitated Haider replies: 'You people feel disenchanted with the Awami League and an independent Bangladesh because your expectations had risen too high.' Suranjan is very hurt by such a comment, particularly as he considered himself more of an atheist than a Hindu. Suranjan thinks it a great tragedy that Hindus of Bangladesh have to pay the price for atrocities by Hindus of India. He finds the BJP and Jamaat leaders meeting in secret, a proverbial conspiracy. The contradiction between their public pronouncements pleading peace and acts of violence by their cadres stand out. In a silent protest Suranjan refuses to participate in the human chain organized by the National Coordination Committee. He tells Haider of all the torture his father had undergone in 1971 at the hands of the Pakistani army which had cut off his father's penis before they let him go. Haider informs him that Parveen (Suranjan's one-time sweetheart) has divorced her husband. It does not excite any emotion in him.

Suranjan then goes out in a rickshaw to his friend Pulak to borrow some money, as he does not want to borrow money from a Muslim. Pulak is surprised at his anti-Muslim rhetoric because he was known to be very secular. He never allowed anybody to comment on Muslims even in private. To Pulak's surprise Suranjan this day starts talking like other Hindus about the atrocities on the Hindus. On Suranjan's way back home he goes to Ratna to propose and provide her with a sense of security but is unabe to propose, so deep is his cynicism.

When Suranjan finally returns home, the biggest shock is awaiting him. He finds his home looted, his sick and paralyzed father lying on

the floor. Maya who had returned to take care of her ill father has been kidnapped again at gun point. Though it was early evening, no neighbour had intervened in spite of his mother's alarming cries for help. Even the owner of the house they rent did not intervene. Neighbours only expressed some empty sympathy. His mother identified one of the abductors, yet the police do nothing. Knowing that in this conservative society a raped woman is better dead than alive, he hopes Maya comes back unharmed. His efforts and the efforts of his friends like Haider do not result in recovery of Maya from the hands of the miscreants. The Dutta family now confines itself to the apartment day and night. Friends from the party office visit them to show sympathy but their reaction is negative.

Stories of atrocities on Hindus trickle to them in hordes. Neighbours affected or unaffected by riots start leaving Bangladesh for India. The news travels to him that Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) leaders have instigated violence in many places to defame the Awami League which had the traditional support of Hindus. Suranjan likes the statement of Sk. Hasina in the All Party Conference: 'It's a pity that after 21 years of independence we have to plead for communal amity.' He, however, is skeptical that rioters will be resisted by the combined cultural front.

The focus moves to the 17th of December, Bijoy Divas or victory day, commemorating the liberation of Bangladesh. Suranjan does not feel the enthusiasm of earlier years. He stays put in the apartment all day. Even his friend Haider does not show up to invite him to join the festivities. Finally he goes out at 8 o'clock in the evening to the bazaar and picks up a young Muslim prostitute, brings her home and rapes her. His feeling of humiliation is thus avenged on the once sacred Bijoy Divas. Once idealist Suranjan has no feelings any more for the poor young innocent Muslim girl Shamima, so deep is his alienation. He just remembers his helplessness, when after filing an FIR about Maya's abduction, he gave his name as Suranjan Dutta as the complainant. The police officer-in-charge clearly showed his unwillingness to act on this complaint even though one of the abductors had been identified.

Haider informs him the next morning that the Gana Kabar (mass grave of intellectuals killed by the Rajakars just before the surrender of the Pakistan army in December 1971) in Rajshahi University has been defiled and destroyed by the Jamaat. Suranjan refuses to admit that he knows what a Gana Kabar is, and his long-time friend Haider leaves in anger. He derives some masochistic pleasure at this and the information that Parveen is back in her father's house after divorce from her Muslim husband.

Suranjan later gets into an argument with his father who is concerned about his life and safety. Dr. Dutta argues that there are lots of good men in this country who are expressing open dissent with the fundamentalist line by taking to the streets. How many countries in the world, he asks, give their people such rights? Suranjan argues that such are superficial and ineffective steps. He argues that if minorities do not even have equal rights under the constitution and people like Ahmed Sharif can avoid the arms of the law in spite of known atrocities against minorities and patriots, there is no hope for Bangladesh. Dr. Dutta tells his son that he is suffering from unnecessary disillusionment and despair. In an intimate discussion with his father, Suranjan admits that in spite of his long association with Marxists and people's movements he has recently become communal because of the situation in Bangladesh. He faults the environment. He says he has found leftists who cursed him as 'sala malaun' (damn malaun, a derogatory comment applied to Hindus). He remembers the sense of violation he felt when fooled into eating beef by a Muslim classmate and the subsequent animal-like rejoicing of his other Muslim classmates on hearing of it. His father attempted to diffuse the situation by arranging to cook and eat beef at home. The sense of violation and indignity could never be erased from his memory.

Sudhamoy realizes his son is so upset with society, family and the state that he is suffering from a lack of self-esteem. He remembers the sense of surprise when his wife Karunamoyee told a Muslim family friend, Aleya Begum, why they were not migrating to India though many of their family had done so, 'since it is their own country'.

Suranjan resents the sense of insecurity and risk because of his Hindu name, even though actually he is an atheist. Once he used to plead for communal amity, and argue that riots in Bangladesh are few and far between, now he thinks: why do the people of Bangladesh have to be penalized for the crimes of Indians, and why should there be a comparison of atrocities, which wherever they are, are equally bad? Additionally, the slow erosion of proportional representation in government jobs and local bodies has increased the feeling of both physical and psychological insecurity among minorities.

Then one day Ratna, his recent flame, walks in with a handsome young man and introduces him as her husband, Humayun. Suranjan is totally devastated and looses his balance. He understands that Ratna has married Humayun to buy security of life and property, and that indignity pains him immeasurably. He refuses to host them and practically turns them out.

As that evening wears on both father and son are stunned by the loud heart-breaking wailing cry of Karunamoyee, the selfless dedicated, ever-silent, reserved woman. Suranjan declares that he has decided to go to India. Sudhamoy refuses, arguing it is too late after Maya is abducted and that he is against restarting a rootless life. Suranjan knows he would lose out in convincing his stubborn father. He falls asleep after deliberating through the night.

In the morning he is awakened by his paralyzed father who has moved to his room with the help of his mother to announce that he is now willing to go to India. Sudhamoy tells Suranjan of his decision in a shaken voice and with feeling of shame, as it goes against his long-felt resolve and belief. Thus, the book ends with a defeat of sorts for higher human values and a victory for the baser one of communalism.

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finally change. They already talk about going to Colombo through Elephant Pass or Pooneryn. It is very important that there are soon concrete signs of change in attitude because we now hope to have a government which cares for its citizens in the North. The momentum of hope for peace must not be lost'.

– Extract of letter dated 24 August to a friend in London from a Christian religious dignitory in Jaffna.

READERS FORUM

ELECTION 1994

THE rule of the U.N.P. for 17 long years has left our country in total disarray. The masses have had to silently suffer under a tyranny with emergency powers. A small elite surrounding the U.N.P. and the rich enjoyed power at the cost of the ordinary masses, especially the farmers.

Let us go down memory lane for a minute. During the last democratic elections held in our land the SLFP was blamed for the queues in our stores. On the other hand with the election of the UNP we have seen the cost of basic necessities go beyond the reach of the common man. The SLFP were criticised for their poor economic planning. Yet that government, encouraged local industry and the farming lobby. We became self-sufficient in most food items as well as a few industrial goods. The U.N.P. has on the other hand only helped foreign farmers at the cost of our own.

Furthermore, under the guise of introducing a Presidential form of government, Mr. J.R. Jayawardhane, the old fox usurped the powers of Parliament. The people were in the process deprived of their democratic rights. A point to note here. The system of by-elections was done away with resulting in the people not being able to show their concern and discontent in the government. Whenever a seat became vacant he made the party secretary to write down a name on a piece of paper and send it to the Commissioner of Elections and the Speaker and the bearer of that name became the MP! The electorate never had the privilege of even knowing the name of their future MP till he was actually appointed. Under that government MPP were treated like civil servants, who were appointed, interdicted, suspended and dismissed. The President could dismiss Parliament, at his whim. He was a virtual dictator not answerable to anyone. In the U.S.A. the President is answerable to the Congress, in the former U.S.S.R., the Russian Head of State was answerable to the Soviet-Parliament. But here the Sri Lankan President is not answerable to any one including the Courts.

It is also interesting to note as to how he manipulated the passing of the Bill that created the Executive President. It was reported that half way through the discussion in the Parliament, at adjournment time Mr. J.R. Jayawardhane was reported to have taken all the MPP out and showed them new jeeps that were parked in the premises of the parliament and announced that those new jeeps were for the use of the MPP. When the MPP walked back into the House their minds and hearts were on the jeeps and not in the substance of the Bill. At close of discussions almost all shouted 'Ayes' and walked out of the House and jumped into the newly acquired jeeps and drove away little knowing that they had abdicated all their rights and powers in favour of a scheming Prime Minister who was assuming as the first Executive President of Sri Lanka the right to do anything and everything.

With an iron fist and emergency powers, the U.N.P. had terrorised the people into subjugation. No protests were allowed. Strikes were prohibited. Thousands of Sinhala youths in the South were killed, many more were maimed, others disappeared without trace. Mothers were endlessly calling at police stations and military camps to find out the fate of their children. To this day we find that thousands of Sinhalese youths are being sacrificed at the alter of an unwanted and costly war. It is not a war against a foreign invasion, it is purely a domestic problem which with trust and understanding could be solved, avoiding the great loss of life.

The Tamils and Sinhalese have lived in this country for centuries like brothers and sisters. They have intermarried. The ordinary Sinhalese people are not against the Tamils. The Sinhalese are a lovable and most hospitable people. It was the scheming politicians who misinformed and misguided them for the sake of their personal power and gains.

I am inclined to agree with Mr. Kumar Ponnampalam. The successive Sinhala Governments have made the Tamils bitter, so the Tamils are unable to trust any Sinhala leader. But in Ms. Chandrika Kumaranatunga we find a firm and committed leader. Every Tamil, Muslim and Sinhalese must believe the genuine and sincere speeches she is making all over the country. She appers to have the charisma and farsightedness to find a solution acceptable to all. I am inclined to believe that she could find a way to settle the ethnic problem to the satisfaction of all. After all whether we like it or not all of us and future generations to come have to live together in this country.

Every Sri Lankan yearns for peace. By the genuine and courageous statements she has been making from public platforms all over the country Ms. Chandrika has convinced everyone that at long last there has emerged a truly National Leader having the interests of all sections of the people and the Nation as a whole at heart, who could rid this country of communal politics and establish a truly democratic government, where the people need have no fear, whatever – to speak. write, assemble, criticise and to follow any pursuit they like unfettered. I remember how the late Mr. S.W.R.D. Bandaranayake got leaflets affixed to all the public transport vehicles which said: 'Positions and Power are given by people to Politicians to serve them and not to be their masters'. He was the one leader who genuinely felt for the common man, he raised the status of the Swabasha teachers, Ayurvedic Physicians etc.

Some people try to say that all politicians say everything before elections and then forget what they have said. This sound true thinking of the past. But in Ms. Chandrika we all could safely repose trust and confidence. Let this be the last chance that the Tamils and Muslims give to a National Leader. Tamils and Muslims should trust the S.L.F.P., now the P.A. and never the U.N.P. Mr. J.R. Jayawardhane promised in his 1977 manifesto to solve the Tamil problem and later declared that if the Tamils wanted peace they could have it and if they wanted war they could have it too!' He totally disowned the North and East.

When J.R. was defeated by the late Mr. R.G. Senanayake at Kelaniya he came running to Colombo West to get into parliament with the vote of the Tamils. He had more than a two third majority, and if he wanted he would have settled the ethnic problem. He on the other hand utilised that majority to deprive Mrs. Bandaranayake of her seat in Parliament. By having extended the Parliament by a rerferendum he kept his more than two third majority for the next term as well; had an election been held the

majority, would have been reduced. This was totally undemocratic.

What is worse is that the present President Wijetunga, despite the whole world knowing the ethnic problem and despite the fact there was an all party conference on the ethnic question says that there is no ethnic problem. Only God can save a country under him.

I genuinely believe that the salvation for all lies in electing the P.A. into power paving the way for Ms. Chandrika to assume power.

V. Kanthaswamy,

Thornton Heath,
Surrey, CR7 6AJ.
U.K.

DID JESUS LIVE IN INDIA?

REFERENCE this interesting article in *Tamil Times* of May, 1994 and the letter to Editor on the same subject in July, 1994, may I add my contribution as follows?

This subject was commented upon by Jawaharal Nehru when he wrote from prison on April 12, 1932 to young daughter Indira who later became Indira Gandhi and another Prime Minister of India.

This letter along with many other letters which Nehru wrote were published in book form as 'Glimpses of World History'. This was first published by Lindsay Drummond in London in 1934, revised and updated in 1939 and reprinted in 1942. I read this book as a youngster in Colombo and was able to look it up again in the London Borough of Wandsworth's Mill Hill public library special collection in their basement, tracing the book through their latest computer index. How much the library services have changed over the years!

This is what Nehru wrote about Jesus to young Indira in 1932:

'. . . . It is not clear what Jesus did or where he went before he started his preaching. All over Central Asia, in Kashmir and Ladakh and Tibet and even farther north, there is still a strong belief that Jesus or Isã travelled about there. Some people believe that he visited India also. It is not possible to say anything with certainty, and indeed most authorities who have studied the life of Jesus do not believe that Jesus came to India or Central Asia. But there is nothing inherently improbable in his having done so. In those days the great universities of India, specially Takashashila in the north-west, attracted earnest students from distant countries, and Jesus might well have come there in quest of knowledge. In many respects the teachings of Jesus is so similar to Gautama's teaching that it seems highly probable that he was fully acquainted with it. But Buddhism was sufficiently known in other countries, and Jesus could well have known of it without coming to India. . . '.

I am inclined to think this well might be the contemporary scene with the exception Jesus' teaching was so much special in that it was in line with a greater calling as it is self-evident in not just one but four gospels of the New Testament. In effect these are four separate reports and testimonies to Jesus' ministry in the West Asian land of Palestine.

I think it is also highly probable that in discussions in among the apostles, the possible influence of Central Asia on Jesus' thinking may have been the driving force for St. Thomas to come to India to spread the teaching of Jesus Christ. After the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, there was a 'philosophical liberation' which sent the apostles in different directions to spread the message. St. Thomas had the driving force to reach India and as a determined man got as far as South India. His work in the Malabar coast is a matter of good record.

The archaeological find of the Anuradhapura cross indicates that the Christianity which came to India at the time of St. Thomas even reached the heart of Sri Lanka – the capital city of Anuradhapura after touching areas like Mannar and Jaffna because of their close proximity to the Malabar Coast within first century AD. This may have been due to trading and commerce at that time between Sri Lanka and India. all this is well before the second wave of Christianity brought to the Indian subcontinent by the Portuguese in the 16th century.

Even if Jesus did not physically visit India, he was certainly there in spirit in India and Sri Lanka from the very first century AD due St. Thomas!

It should be noted that Christianity reached India well before it came to England or Western Europe. Nehru also says this to young Indira in his letter from the prison.

Sydney Xavier,

10 Holland Avenue,
West Wimbledon,
London SW20 0RN.

CONGRATULATIONS FOR NEW PM

WE AGREE with what you state in your Editorial of August 1994. The new government under the premiership of Mrs. Chandrika Kumaratunga of the SLFP and People's Alliance is indeed a long overdue change for the better. We support her utterances and actions in attempting to solve the ethnic problem of the Island as a matter of top priority. She has taken steps to initiate peace talks with the Tamil Tigers. She has removed the ban on certain essential commodities imposed by the earlier governments. May this momentum continue unhindered till we achieve lasting peace!

The first thing to be done is to change the racist Jayawardene Constitution. But, as you correctly point out, what an unappealing situation which his Constitution and his executive presidential system have landed Sri Lanka in? The stumbling block would be the difficulty of finding 2/3rd majority to change it, with no parliamentary consensus.

Isn't it irresponsible the Sinhala Federation in the UK has made an issue out of Chandrika's honest utterance: 'Sri Lankan army is equal to or worse than the Tamil terrorists'. The Sri Lankan News recently criticised her in an article that said had it not been for the army 'the country would have been dismembered and there would have been a complete genocide of the Sinhalese and Muslims by the Tamil terrorists'. They seem to have got disoriented and do not realise or accept the fact that it was army atrocities and state terrorism that created the Tamil Tigers firstly. Even UNP's late President Premadasa publicly admitted this.

The socialism imbibed by the new PM at Sorbonne University, and her experience as a P.C. Chief Minister has endowed her with the insight to better understand Tamil aspirations. It would appear that the Island's political future is closely tied with that of the Bandaranaikes.

We also take this opportunity to congratulate Mrs. Chandrika Kamaratunga on her being appointed the new Prime Minister and wish her the best of luck.

Lt. Col. A.J.N. Selvadurai,

Federation of Tamil Associations,
United Kingdom.

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MATRIMONIAL

Hindu Tamil brother *seeks partner for sister, mid-thirties, widow with one child. Divorcee or widower considered. M 749 c/o Tamil Times.*

Father Jaffna Tamil Hindu, mother Sinhala Buddhist, Australian Citizens *seek professional partner for their daughter, 24, educated overseas all her life, Australian graduate presently employed. Further information and horoscope available on request. M 750 c/o Tamil Times.*

Jaffna Hindu sister *seeks fair educated bride for Norwegian citizen brother, 32, in good employment. Send horoscope, photo and details. M 751 c/o Tamil Times.*

Family *seeks partner for early retired, very healthy Jaffna Hindu Canadian citizen in late fifties with business assets and no encumbrances. Send details M 752 c/o Tamil Times.*

Doctor *seeks suitable partner for pretty niece, Jaffna Hindu, 32, following computer course in Colombo. Send full details and horoscope in first instance. M 753 c/o Tamil Times.*

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WEDDING BELLS

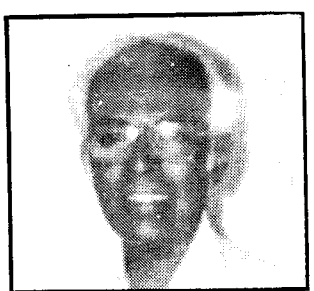
We congratulate the following couples on their recent wedding.

Sivaraj *son of Mr. & Mrs. N. Tharmalingam of 13 Byron Avenue, London E12 and* **Jamuna** *daughter of the late Mr. N. Sivarajah and Mrs. Kamaladevi Sivarajah of 4 Elfintale Lane, Colombo 4 on 10th September '94 at The Hotel Taj Samudra, Colombo 3.*

Mahendra Suresh *son of Mr. & Mrs. S. Rajadurai of Uyarapulam, Anaicoddai, Sri Lanka and* **Anpuchchelvi** *daughter of the late Professor & Mrs. Vithianathan of 'Tamilakam', Tellipallai, Sri Lanka on 10th September '94 at North York Memorial Community Hall, Ontario, Canada.*

Srivijayarajah *son of the late Mr. S. Senathirajah and Mrs. S. Senathirajah of 63 Gatton Road, London SW17 0EX and* **Sivaranee** *daughter of Mr. & Mrs. M. Markandu of Araly South, Vaddukoddai, Sri Lanka on 10th September '94 at the Wembley High School Hall, East Lane, Wembley Middx.*

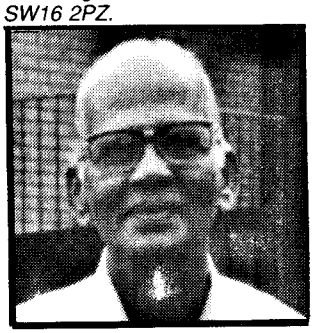
OBITUARIES



Mr. M. Gnanasambanthan *(Sam), Aeronautical and Automobile Engineer, Retired Civil Servant; beloved husband of Sivanandavalli (Ananthy); cherished father of Ramani B.A. Hons. and Loga Dharshini (Oxford University); son of the late Mr. & Mrs. S. Muttiah (Ipoh, Malaysia); only brother of Mrs. K. Arumugam (Melbourne, Australia) passed away in London on 5.8.94 and was cremated on 10th at Golders Green Crematorium. – 10 Westward Way, Harrow, Middx., HA3 0SE. Tel: 081-907 0533.*

Chinnappahpillai Rajendran (92) *formerly Branch Manager, Oriental Life Assurance and Pearl Life Office, Jaffna; beloved husband of the late Tharmambikaipillai; father of Vijayaraghavan (Sri Lanka) and Mrs. Saraswathy Thirunavukkarasu; father-in-law of Thillainayagi and Dr. Thirunavukkarasu; grandfather of Rathika, Darshika, Mrs. Sassikala Aidan, Ratnakumar, Mrs. Vathsala Sureshparran and Mrs. Sukaniya Hanson passed away after a brief illness on 7.6.94 in U.K. – 30 Ennerdale Avenue, Stanmore, Middx., HA7 2LD. Tel: 081-907 8942.*

Thambirajah Sivalingam, *beloved husband of Malar; father of Sivarangini and Sivaruben; son of the late Mr. A. Thambirajah (Rasa), Native Physician and the late Mrs. Thambirajah; brother of Dr. Gunasuntharam, Mahalingam (both of London), Muthulingam, Ratnasingam and Selvamalar (all of Toronto, Canada); brother-in-law of Rajini, Vicky, Vasanthi, Kala and Ganeshathasan passed away in Kuppilan, Jaffna on 22.8.94. – 48 Leigham Avenue, London SW16 2PZ.*



Mr. Sabapathy Nagalingam *J.P., (Former Proprietor, Lincoln Printers) of 72 Mayfield Road, Kotahena; Dearly beloved husband of Kanmani; loving father of Umakanthy (Canada), Yogadason (Canada), Kamalakanthy (London), Jayakanthy (America) and Shanmugadason (Engineer, Australia); father-in-law of Balendran (Engineer, Canada), Sivakumar (Engineer, London), Sooriyakumar (Accountant, America), Ruby (Canada) and Sivamalar (Australia); brother of Sinthamani (Colombo); grandfather of Senthooran, Ganesh, Ashwin, Gayathri, Janani, Krishanthy and Revathy passed away in Toronto, Canada on 30th August 1994. Funeral took place on Saturday, 3rd September 1994 in Canada. – 4 Argyll Gardens, Edgware, Middlesex HA8 5HB. Tel: 081 905 6992/081 381 2285.*

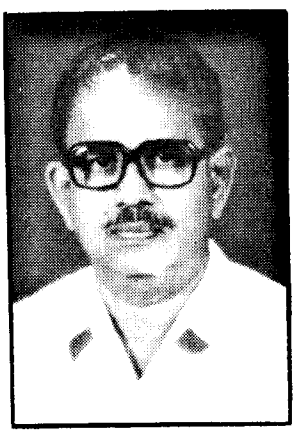
IN MEMORIAM

In Loving Memory of Our Beloved Daddy
T.J. Rajaratnam
(Retired High Court Judge)
Born 23.1.1919

Called to Rest 15.9.81.

In God's care you rest above
While in our hearts you dwell in love,
Unseen, Unheard, yet very near,
Still loved, still missed and very dear.

Fondly remembered ***and*** *sadly missed by your wife Arul; children Rohini, Renuka, Rajiv; sons-in-law Vijayan, Sriharan; grand children Vasi, Ravi, Prathi, Jayanthy and Ajit.*



In everloving memory of **Deva Rajan** *N.,F.S.I., Licensed Surveyor, Leveller & Valuer of 257 Arasady Road, Kantharmadam, Yarlpanam.*

Fondly remembered on the third anniversary of his passing away on 11.9.91 by his belovec wife Padma; children Sujithar Siva Kumaran, Rajam, Jeyaraman, Rengan, Raj Iswari; sons-in-law Theventhiran, Nirthanakumaran; daughters-in-law Jeyadevi, Suhanya, Thangalogini, Helen; Grand childrer Jamuna, Karthika, Bharathar Uththami, Luxmanan, Sri Ran Vaitharani, Vithuran, Devarajar and Poorani; sister Saraswathy Panchacharam; brother Punjaksharam; sisters-in-law. brothers-in-law, relatives and friends. Flat 4, 24 Mansfiek Road, Ilford, Essex IG1 3AZ.

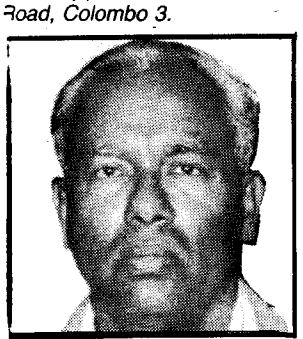
In fond memory of **Mr. M.A. Rasiah** *(former Head Master, Illavalai, Ceylon and Teacher at Herts. Tamil School, Watford, U.K.) on the second anniversary of his passing away on 18th September 1992.*

The love and kindness you bestowed on us
Shall for ever be treasured in our hearts

May God Bless You. Mrs. N. Rasiah (Colombo), Sathiananthan (Watford), Packiarajah (Colombo), Stella Devendra (Dubai), Shanker (New Malden), Theresa Nagarajah (Mathagal), Logan (Watford) and Emilda Daniel (Canada).

In loving memory of **Mrs. Yogeswary Wallooppillai** *on the first anniversary of her passing away on 2.9.93.*

Fondly remembered by her beloved husband Dr. N.J. Wallooppillai; daughter Mala; sisters Gnaneswari and Arasi Mahadevan; brother Yogendran – Mrs. Arasi Mahadevan, 57 Chesterfield Road, Epsom, Surrey KT19 9QR./Dr. N.J. Wallooppillai, 20/1 Pedris Road, Colombo 3.

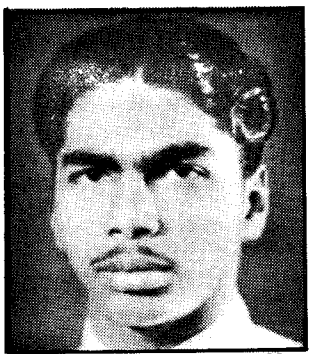


In loving memory of **Dr. Saravanamuttu Paramanathan** *on the third anniversary of his passing away on 26th September 1991.*

Greatly missed and fondly remembered with love and affection by his wife Vallambihai, his children Lohini, Mohini, Wickneswaran; his sons-in-law Ganesharatnam and Ratnasabapathy (Napo); daughter-in-law Bernada; his grand children Kumaran, Vanathy, Haran and Dhakshila. – 30 The Ridgeway, Kenton, Harrow, Middx., HA3 0LL.

In loving memory of **Mr. M. Murugupillai,** *Retired Assessor, Inland Revenue Department and Auditor, Sri Lanka on the first anniversary of his passing away on 22.9.93.*

Greatly missed and fondly remembered by his beloved wife Rajarajeswari; children Kamala Jothi and Sivakumar; son-in-law Dr. Vijeyapalan; daughter-in-law Priyakanthi; grandchildren Prabhani, Shivani, Vignesh and Kapilan; brother Sinnathurai; and sister Sellamma Kasiviswanathan – 129 Bawnmore Road, Bilton, Rugby CV22 6JJ. Tel: 0788 817301.



In loving memory of **Mr. Apputhurai Gunaratnam** *of Point Pedro, Sri Lanka formerly Divisional Superintendent of Post Offices, Sri Lanka on the fourth anniversary of his passing away on 28.8.90.*

Sadly missed by his loving wife Rani; children Thirukumaran (Australia), Vasuki (Sri Lanka), Devaki (Australia), Sutharsan (UK) and Sarath Devi (Sri Lanka); daughter-in-law Vasanthi; son-in-law Radhakrishnan; grand daughter Mayurica; sister and in-laws. – 67B St. Ann's Road, London N15 6NJ. Tel: 081-802 5601.

In loving memory of **Mr. C. Kanthasamy** *on the sixth anniversary of his passing away on 11th September 1988.*

Those we love don't go away
They walk beside us every day.

Sadly missed and fondly remembered by his everloving wife Pushparani, children Ranjini, Ranjan, Mohan, and Rajini; sons-in-law Nadesan and Ravi-Indran; daughters-in-law Raji and Ranjini; grand children Kishanthan, Arun, Ramesh, Ramya, Rangan, Luxmy and Rekha. – Mrs. P. Kanthasamy, 58 Magowar Road, Giraween, NSW 2145, Australia.

FORTHCOMING EVENTS

October 1 *Eekathasi, Third Puraddasi Sani.*

Oct. 2 *Pirathosam. 10.00am. Kolam Competition at Wembley High School Hall, East Lane, Wembley, Middx. For details Tel: 081-904 3937/907 6638.*

Oct. 4 *Amavasai; Feast of St. Francis of Assisi.*

Oct. 5 *Navaraththiri Viratham starts.*

Oct. 7 *Feast of Our Lady of the Rosary.*

Oct. 8 *Sathurthi, Fourth Puraddasi Sani.*

Oct. 13 *Saraswathy Pooja.*

Oct. 14 *Vijayathasami, Manampoo.*

Oct. 15 *Eekathasi, Fifth Puraddasi Sani, Feast of St. Teresa of Avila.*

Oct. 15 *6.30pm 'Kalaikkolam' a festival of Dance Dramas at Brent Town Hall, Forty Lane, Wembley, Middx., Tel: 081-904 3937/907 6638.*

Oct. 16 *Pirathosam.*

Oct. 17 *Feast of St. Ignatius of Antioch.*

Oct. 19 *Full Moon.*

Oct. 21 *First Iypasi Velli.*

Oct. 25 *Feast of Forty Martyrs of England and Six Martyrs o Wales.*

Oct. 28 *Second Iypasi Velli.*

Oct. 30 *Eekathasi.*

At the Bhawan Centre, 4A Castletown Road, London W14 9HQ. Tel: 071 381 3086/ 4608.

Oct. 1 *5.30pm Concluding Lecture on Gita by Sri Mathoor Krishnamurti.*

Oct. 1 *7.00pm Hindustani Vocal by Lalitha Rao leading vocalist of India.*

Oct. 16 *6.30pm Bharatha Natyam by Robinson Cama with musicians from India.*

Appointed to Canadian Immigration & Refugee Board

Congratulations to Dr. (Mrs.) Paul Verhoff (Nee Sashika Seevaratnam) on her appointment to the prestigious Canadian Immigration & Refugee Board. Sashi as she is affectionately known came to Canada from Sri Lanka in her preteens and has recently completed three decades of residence in Canada.

Sashi's speciality is Law and this yoke on her young shoulders would enable her to function with added zest and talent. Her grand fathers Sam Seevaratnam and Nesiah were distinguished educationalists in Sri Lanka. We wish her well.

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IN MEMORIAM

In loving memory of **Mrs. Rasalakshmy Nalliah** *of Lingavasam Sandilipay, Jaffna and 22 Lily Avenue, Wellawatta, on the 25th anniversary of her passing away on 7th September 1969.*

Mrs. Rasalakshmy Nalliah had her early education in Malaysia and continued at Chundikuli Girls High School, Jaffna. As she was the eldest of five brothers and sisters, resident in Sri Lanka, she decided to get married in preference to further studies in the interest of her family. Her father Mr. Vaithilingam a planter in Malaysia together with her elder brother and sister were separated from the rest of the family because of World War 2.

Along with her husband she helped her sick mother by taking over the responsibility of her siblings and guided them over the most difficult period for the family.

After her husband joined the staff at Royal Primary School Colombo she set up home at 22 Lily Avenue, Colombo 6. This was not merely a home but an 'open house' for her family and friends. There was no end to the traffic that arrived at Lily Avenue for temporary accommodation, advice on educational matters, health problems, career choice, jobs etc., for which they provided ready solutions quite cheerfully.

Her social responsibilities increased when her husband was appointed Principal of Colombo Hindu Junior School, Bambalapitiya. It was a difficult time for the community and she lived up to the challenge successfully. It was during this period that her illness became more severe but she had the satisfaction to see both her children Balachandran and Ponmalar doing well as undergraduates at Universities in Sri Lanka and India. Alas! She could not live to see them pass out with flying colours. Towards the end she took everything philosophically and with a fine sense of humour.

Sadly missed and fondly remembered by her beloved husband Mr. P. Nalliah; children, Dr. Balachandran Nalliah (U.S.A.) and Malar Sarveswaran; daughter-in-law Mrs. Shirani Nalliah; son-in-law Dr. Muthubalasuriyar Sarveswaran and grandchildren : Haran, Radha Priya, Logan and Niroshini. Gratefully remembered by her brothers, sisters and their families in Sri Lanka, U.K., Malaysia, Australia and Canada, and precious memories cherished by friends all over the world.

Mr. Nalliah is living with his daughter and family at 53 Greenock Avenue, Scarborough, Ontario M1G 2Z7, Canada.

P. Sathianandan,
a cousin.

Ontario Senior Tamils on Day Tours

The Ontario Senior Tamils organised several day tours during the 1994 summer. Over 500 members participated in these day tours, the charges for which were minimal.

One of the tours was to Stratford-on-Avon where they enjoyed an elite performance of Shakespeare's 'Twelfth Night'. The show was world class and many senior Tamils are proud to be Ontarians.

The picture below shows some of them on a hayride on one of the agricultural farms.

South London Tamil School

Three cultural evenings (July 9th, 16th and 24th) in celebration of the Tenth Anniversary of South London Tamil School, proclaimed the excellence of achievements earned by the school in its curriculum of Tamil learning and cultural discipline. It is gladdening that this Croydon Tamil school thought of the celebration not as its own achievement but that of the entire Tamil schools in the outer London, judged by the participation of students from other Tamil schools in the programme of events and the congratulatory messages received from their institutions.

The celebrations on the 9th and 16th July were conducted at the South Norwood Centre, (where the school is located) with a variety of events like elocution and essay contests, vocal and instrumental recitals and plays. It was eye catching and ear filling to watch the different grades of children singing or playing on the veena, violin or mridangam in formations. In some of these events beside students of South London Tamil School others from Thiruvalluvar Tamil School, London Tamil Centre, Waltham Forest Tamil School and West London Tamil School took part and won prizes. An exhibition organised by the teachers to highlight the achievements of the school proved a great attraction.

The little children of the school staging a play under the title 'Kutravali Yaar' (who is culpable?) displayed their histrionic talent to the great admiration of the audience. The enacting of the final part of Sakunthalai drama by the drama section of the school in which present and past students took part evoked admiration of the audience. The students who took the parts of the fisherman and his partner enacted so realistically that they got the biggest applause from the audience.

The final day's events conducted at Ashcroft Theatre of Fairfield Halls drew a large audience. A musical feast with a group of singers and a variety of instruments entertained the audience first. Two dance dramas and a hilarious comedy by parents were the highlights of the evening. One of the dance dramas depicted the competitive spirit of the four celestial dancers Menaka, Ramba, Urvasi and Thilothama, and the other on the immortal Meera's Dream of aspiring for the presence of Krishna. Colourful costumes and nymphal dance numbers added to the spirit of the themes. There was also a vocal recital by little children of a devotional 'kilikkanni' wrongly announced as 'kavadi Sindhu'. There was added to the programme a special flute recital by a visiting artiste from Radio Ceylon. The hilarious comedy by the adults was a wonderful farce decrying social evils. The colourful appearance of the God of Death Yama and the fate deciding Chitraquptha on the stage evoked spontaneous applause. The Mayor of Croydon was the Chief Guest and blessed the school.

The South London Tamil School deserves the congratulations of the Tamil community on its achievements in ten years of service.

AUSTRALIAN NEWS LETTER

Sydney Tamil Manrah

The Sydney Tamil Manram presented Bharata Natyam and Kuchipudi performances by Padma Balakumar and Padma Raman on August 7 at the Auburn Council Hall. Padma Balakumar, was trained at Kalakshetra. Her program included Kowthuvam, Jathiswaram and Varnam. In the second half of the concert, Padma Raman performed Kuchipudi dances. At the end of the concert, the annual general meeting of the Sydney Tamil Manram was held, with election of office-bearers.

New South Wales Tamil Sport Club Awards Night

The Tamil Sports Club held its Annual Award Night on Saturday, August 13th at the Flemington Market Hall.

Awards and trophies were presented to several young people who had excelled at cricket, football, tennis and other sports. The presentation of awards was followed by a sumptuous dinner and entertainment.

Jaffna Central College Dinner

The first dinner organised by the Sydney Old Boys of Jaffna Central College was held on Saturday, August 20th at the North Rocks Community Centre Hall. The evening began with the President Dr. S. Nirmalanandan welcoming the guests. Entertainment was provided by the Sydney Tamil Youths Orchestra. This was followed by an address by the distinguished guest for the evening Mr. S. Mahalingam, Retired Deputy Principal of Jaffna Central College. The message from the sister school, Vembadi Girls' High School was delivered by Mrs. Devi Balasubramaniam. She spoke of the close relationship, historically and socially, between the two schools. Mr. T. Kanagarajah, an Old Boy of Jaffna Central College, recalled his cherished memories of the school.

The singing of the College Song was followed by dinner. After dinner, Dr. E.S. Seelan, the Vice-President, thanked everyone present for their participation. Then the well-known singer Nithi Kanagaratnam, who is an Old Boy, sang many popular Tamil songs as well as Baila songs, which we well appreciated.

'Abaya Karam Concert'

'Anuranjanam', a concert organised by the charity organisation 'Abaya Karam' in aid of the Durgapuram Mahalir Illam in Tellipallai, Sri Lanka, and Sri Ramakrishna Mission Orphanages in Sri Lanka, was held on Saturday, August 27 at Bankstown Town Hall.

The first half of the programme featured artistes from Bharata Vidya Bhavan, London. Srimathi Sivashakti Sivanesan, who has been hailed as the finest Carnatic Vocalist and Bharatanatyam singer in the U.K., gave a brilliant start to the concert with her songs. She was accompanied by Sri M. Ravichandran on the Miruthangam and Srimathi Narmada Ravichandran on the violin.

The presidential address by Mr. K. Sivananthan was followed by 'Navarasam' depicting the nine emotions felt by Sri Parvati, performed by Sri Prakash Yadagudde. The capacity audience expressed their great appreciation of both artistes by their resounding applause. The address by the Guest of Honour, Rev. Pravrajika Ajayaprana Mataji of the Ramakrishna Srada Vadanta Society of New South Wales, marked the end of the first half of the programme. She congratulated the organisers on the wonderful work they were doing to help needy children in Sri Lanka.

The interval was followed by 'Krishna Sagaram' a dance drama by the Lingalayam Dancers – Students of Srimathi Anandavalli.

At the end of the concert presentations were made to the artistes by Mrs. Devi Balasubramaniam Vice-President of 'Abaya Karam'. This was followed by the Raffle Draw.

The concert raised six thousand dollars for charity. Four thousand dollars has already been sent to Miss Thangamma Kopakutty head of the Durgapuram Mahalir Illam in Tellipallai. Two thousand was sent to the Ramakrishna Mission Orphanages in Batticaloa, Sri Lanka. 'Abaya Karam' was formed in 1992. Last year's concert raised six thousand dollars for the Ramakrishna Mission Orphanages in Batticaloa, Sri Lanka.

Mahaakavi Subramanya Bhaarathi : A Musical Tribute

As a modern Thamil poet Subramanya Bhaarathi remains to be surpassed. He was also a great thinker and political campaigner driven by his deep faith in the equality of human beings. He was a rebel who rejected his brahmin identity and campaigned for the equality of women with men. His understanding and interpretation of Hinduism was nothing like it has been seen by its caste-dominated and sectarian practitioners in the sub-continent. The diversity in his thought and writing has made it possible for people to emphasis one aspect of his work at the expense of others. Recent studies of Bhaarathi have largely shed the sentimental approach of the past and sought to identify the essence of his work and the common thread that runs through what are superficially seen as contradicting aspects.

Bhaarathi was born poor and died poor. After his death, nationalist politicians exploited his name and the commercial world of cinema his poetry. A.V. Meyyappan, the founder of the AVM movie empire and the record industry that went with it, apparently had purchased the rights for the commercial use of Bhaarathi's songs from his widow. As a result, until around 1960 when Bhaarathi's poems were declared national property, it was only AVM that could use his poems in movies, which have for decades been the main channel of popular music in Thamil. One consequence was that many of his poems, especially those relating to the national independence movement and to social change, were mellowed by the music to lose their vigour and force.

In the sixties, there was a boom in Bhaarathi songs in Thamil cinema. The songs were mostly relating to romantic and sentimental themes. Kappalottiya Thamilan, telling the story of V.O. Chithamparam Pillai, a great patriot of India and a cruel victim of British colonialism, used only Bhaarathi's poems for all the songs in that movie and used very vigorous and forceful tunes to match the spirit of his songs for national independence.

Another movie that used only Bhaarathi's poems was Elaavathu Manithan in the late seventies with music by L. Vaidhyanaathan, the brother of the two internationally well known Karnaataka violin maestros L. Subramaniam and L. Shankar. The tunes were far more lively than in earlier movies and a few of them were by Rajakumar Bharathi, great-grandson of the poet.

The campaign for Thamil Isai gathered momentum in the middle of this century to explode the myth that Thamil was less suitable than Telugu and Sanskrit for composing kritis and kiirthanais for karnaataka music. In the wake of the awareness that came with this campaign, people started composing in Thamil and many concerts included Thamil songs at least as a token. Some did perform entire concerts in Thamil.

Bhaarathi's poems were a ready source of lyric for many musicians. Bhaarathi, although he has indicated his preferences of raagam and sometimes thaalam for a number of his songs and is known to have sung some of his songs to small audiences, never composed the music for the songs that have been sung on stage or for recording. More often than not, the tunes had nothing to do with Bhaarathi's preferences.

It is still usual for many musicians to sing one song by Bhaarathi, often towards the lighter tail-end of the concert, and 'Sinnanjiru Kiliye' and 'Thiraatha Vilayaatup Pillai' are among the handful of favourites. 'Vaaliya Senthamil' used to be a popular mangalam to the concert and had a noticeable peak during the early years of the Sri Lankan Thamil liberation struggle.

Rajkumar Bhaarathi who visited the UK during July-August gave two concerts in London at the Bharatiya Vidhya Bhavan on successive week-ends. The second one, far better attended than the first, was a pleasant surprise with the entire recital with the exception of two short pieces (one by Jayadeva, 11-12th century and the other by Purantharadaasar, 15-16th century) composed of Bhaarathi's poems. The concert had the formal structure of all Karnataka musical concerts but with the choice of appropriate verses, some from rarely used poems by Bhaarathi. It reminded us of the great wealth of material that remains to be tapped in the works of Bhaarathi.

Both concerts were enthusiastically received by the audience and were among the good Karnaataka vocal concerts that the Thamils in London had the opportunity to attend in recent years. The enthusiasm of the singer was infectious and stimulated the spirited performance by the accompanying artistes. Remarkably the tunes for the songs of Bhaarathi, with one or two possible exceptions, have not been heard before by most of us and were very different from those previously used for Bhaarathi's songs. They captured the devotional and sentimental side of Bhaarathi beautifully. But that, sadly, was one of the limitations of the concert. The Bhaarathi of the independence movement, the rebel and militant was somehow lost in the process of emphasising the spiritual side of the poet.

At this point of time, it may be appropriate to appeal to the organisers of concerts at the Bharatiya Vidhya Bhawan to make an effort to minimise speech making. Sometimes the speakers can be extremely condescending to the point of offending the sensibilities of the artistes and the audience. What is as important is that the time consumed by these speeches can be better used to provide some more good music and if that is not possible to help the audience return home early.

S. Sivasegaram.

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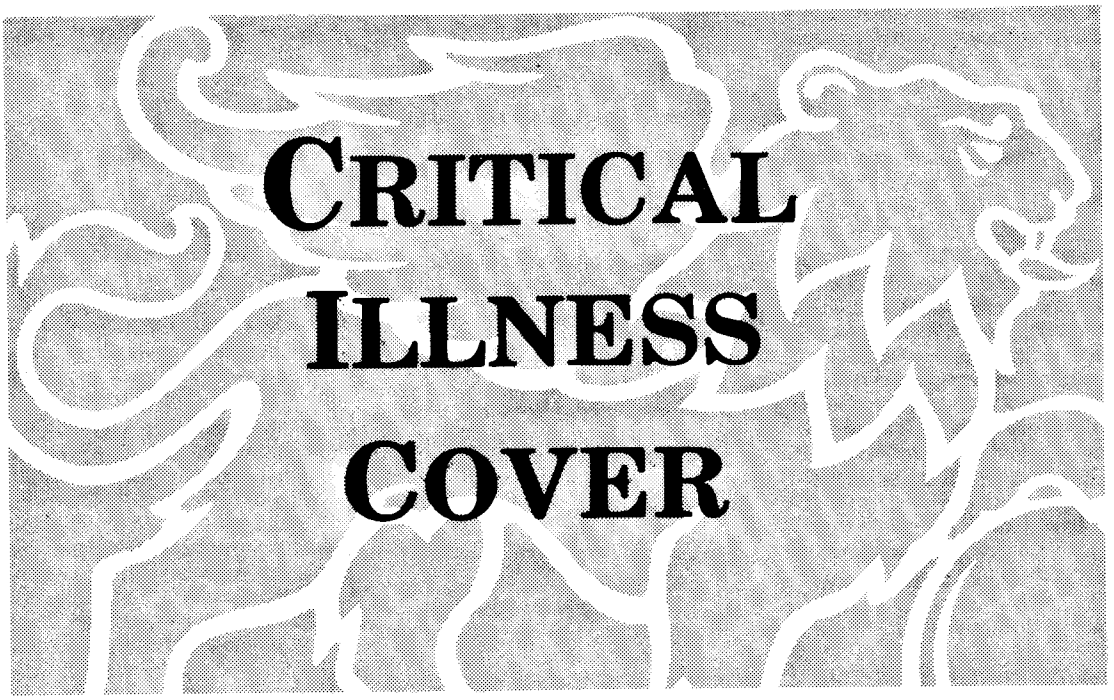

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